07/06/2021

Archbishop Elpidophoros of America, Address at the Ordination of Bishop-Elect Athenagoras of Nazianzos



Your Eminence and Graces,

Beloved Brothers in the Holy Spirit,

Dear Family of Hellenic College and Holy Cross,

Beloved Bishop-Elect of Nazianzos, Your Grace Athenagoras,

Χριστὸς Ἀνέστη! Christ is Risen!

Today is a day of great personal joy for me, our Ecumenical Patriarchate and our Sacred Archdiocese, as we gather to elevate you, my dear Bishop-elect, to the See of Nazianzos, for your service here in America at the permission of His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew.

Your journey has, indeed, been a long one – stretching from Germany and Greece, to Canada, and finally here to America. But no matter where you have lived, studied and served, your heart has always belonged to the Mother Church – for you

are a true son of the Great Church of Christ.

Thus, it was the wise and providential decision of His All-Holiness that you be elected to the venerable See of Nazianzos, which gave its name to the most illustrious Archbishop of Constantinople, Gregory Nazianzen.

This name and title places upon you, Beloved Brother in the Lord, a great and high calling. Of the Three Holy Hierarchs celebrated by the Church on January thirtieth, one is Saint Gregory.[1] And of the Three Saints called “Theologians” by our Holy Church, one is the same Saint Gregory.[2]

Thus, the Church Father who excelled – perhaps above all others – in the exegesis of the Mystery of the Holy Trinity, became himself one of the two great triads of theologians and pastors. And this is a legacy that you, Beloved Bishop-elect, are called to honor and to serve.

As I have known you for many years – as both a friend and a colleague – I know that you have studiously applied yourself to the life and teachings of our Holy Orthodox Christian Faith. But inasmuch as you now bear such an auspicious and, indeed, august and famed title, you must endeavor to go even further.

Like Gregory the Theologian, you must reach within yourself to find the manifestation of God’s glorious revelation as the Holy Trinity. Gregory preached the renown Five Theological Orations – which, like the “five smooth stones of the shepherd boy and future King David, armed him for battle against all heresy and blasphemy.[3] You are also called to defend the Faith “in season and out of season,” as the Apostle commends, to “preach the word; … reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long suffering and doctrine.” [4]

This is the life of a bishop of the Church of God. For we are entrusted with the teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ in order to spread His message of love, mercy, forgiveness and compassion to “every creature.” [5] We are not called to be rulers over the Faithful, but to be their servants, as our Lord Jesus Christ said:

For the Son of Man came to serve and not to be served, and to give His life as a ransom for many.[6]

herefore, Bishop-Elect Athenagoras of Nazianzos, I leave you today with the thoughts and prayers of your Holy predecessor. May his expression and manifestation of the Faith always reign in your heart.

Father be merciful to me.

Grant that I may ever worship this awesome mystery.

But cast away my sins and cleanse my heart of evil thoughts

That I may glorify the Deity,

Lifting up hands that are undefiled;

That I may bless the Christ and bend a supplicant knee,

That He may receive me as a servant

On the day He comes in Kingly power.

Father be merciful to me.
Indeed, I have found both mercy and peace;

For glory and thanks are yours to the everlasting ages. [7]

May the Most Holy Theotokos, whose prayers are joined to Saints Paisios the Athonite and Ephraim of Katounakia, always grant you strength to fulfill this prayer and to be filled by it.

That you may ever serve our Holy God in Trinity, in worthiness and humbleness, in the path of him who was named Nazianzus so many centuries ago, but whose Name and Glory lives on in the Great Church of Christ. Amen.

[1] Together with Saints Basil the Great and John Chrysostom.

[2] Together with Saint John the Theologian and Evangelist, and Saint Symeon the New Theologian (11th Century).

[3] Cf. I Samuel 17:40.

[4] II Timothy 4:2.

[5] Mark 16:15.

[6] Mark 10:45.

[7] St. Gregory of Nazianzos. Hymn 1.1.30. PG 37. 508-510, Tr. J.A. McGuckin.

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