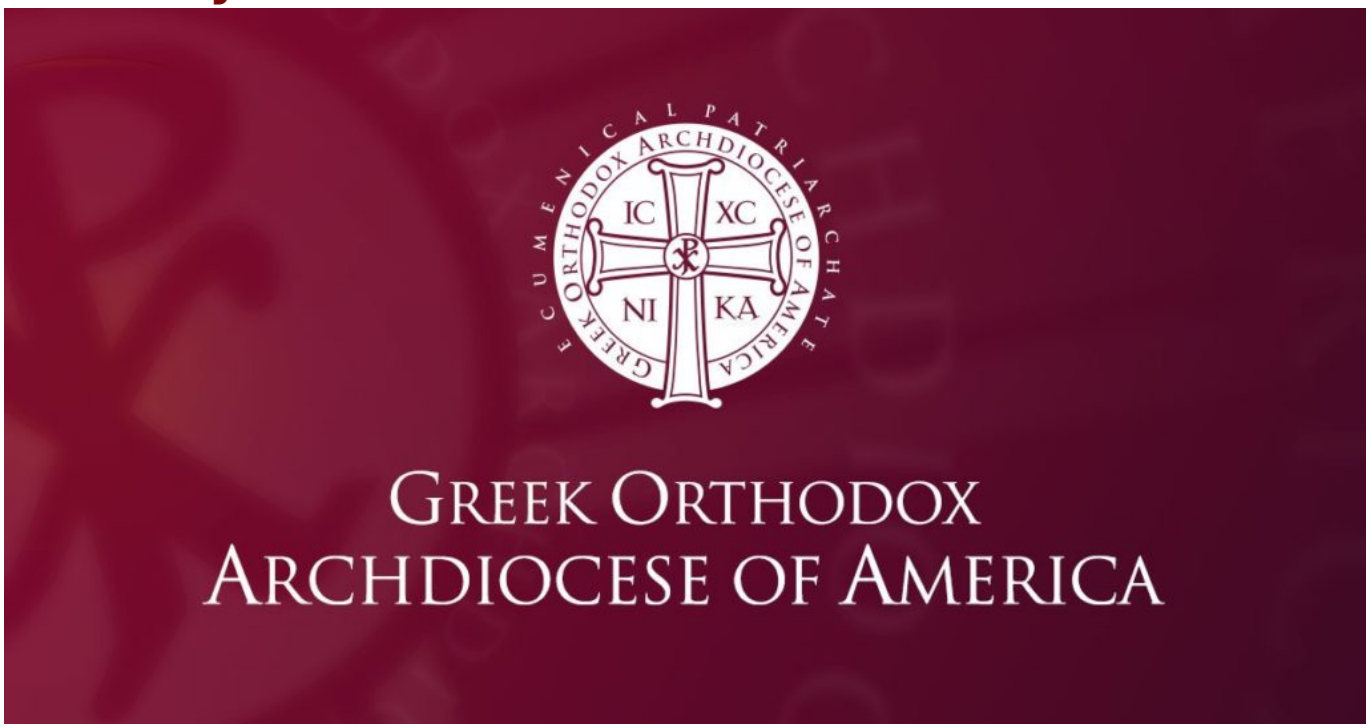
28/06/2021

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



Beloved Deacon Panayiotis,

Today, on this Feast of the Apodosis of Pentecost, you are called to “give back” your ministry to Christ – here, in this magnificent Cathedral.

You are called to “give back” your deacon’s stole that drapes only one shoulder, and to take up the yoke of ministry symbolized by the “epitrachelion.” The priest’s stole is for both shoulders, because now you are yoked to the Holy Altar in order to celebrate the Liturgy. Now you kneel on both knees, because you accept the fullness of Sacramental service to the People of God.

And you will kneel here, in this Cathedral of Holy Wisdom, where you will serve under the direction of a most worthy spiritual father, the Protopresbyter Sergios, whom we all lovingly know as “Father Steve.”

Today, on this Apodosis of Pentecost, you are giving back your deacon's vestments to embrace those of a priest. Your sticharion remains, because the purity of your intentions are indispensable to a God-pleasing ministry.

Your epimanikia remain, because your hands are bound to be upraised before God, like the evening sacrifice of old.[1]

And though I have already mentioned your priestly stole, what is added to you today is the priestly robe – the phelonion, called a chasuble in English. This robe represents the seamless robe of the Lord.

I want you to remember, dear Fr. Panayiotis, not even the Roman soldiers who nailed the Lord Jesus to His Cross would tear this robe, even though they mocked Him with it. For the robe, as Scripture says, "was without seam, woven from top to bottom." [2]

This is an image of the Church, the Body of Christ, which you are called to serve. It is a reminder to all who would join the sacred order of Melchizedek, that we are never to tear the Robe of our Master. Never bring schism and division into the Church. Never make your opinion the standard of the Faith.

We are called to bring unity, even as the Kontakion of this happy day says:

ὅτε τοῦ πυρὸς τὰς γλώσσας διένειμεν, εἰς ἑνότητα πάντας ἐκάλεσε…

when He apportioned the Tongues of Fire, He called all to unity…

The Lord has called all humanity into unity – the unity that is the life of the Holy Trinity. You are called, dear Fr. Panayiotis, to foster that unity in the life of this parish, and wherever God calls you to serve.

Therefore, standing here in this House of Wisdom, this Hagia Sophia, I encourage you to support and sustain your ministry as a priest, on these Seven Pillars, that were established by the Holy Apostle Paul in his Epistle to the Romans:

… εἴτε προφητείαν, κατὰ τὴν ἀναλογίαν τῆς πίστεως, εἴτε διακονίαν, ἐν τῇ διακονίᾳ, εἴτε ὁ διδάσκων, ἐν τῇ διδασκαλίᾳ, εἴτε ὁ παρακαλῶν, ἐν τῇ παρακλήσει, ὁ μεταδιδούς, ἐν ἁπλότητι, ὁ προϊστάμενος, ἐν σπουδῇ, ὁ ἐλεῶν, ἐν ἱλαρότητι.

whether it is prophecy – in proportion to faith, or ministry – by our service, or teaching – by our instruction, or encouragement – by our acts of consoling, generosity – by our open-heartedness, leadership – by the effort we make, mercy –

by our cheerfulness.[3]

Let these seven virtues be the pillars of your ministry!

Prophecy – which is speaking God's word to God's people. Be fearless in your proclamation of the Gospel.

Ministry – which is only realized in the service of others. In late nights and early mornings at the hospital or nursing home, and going the extra mile for your brethren.

Teaching – all that you have learned and continue to learn is the rightful property of the sheep of your fold. Give instruction without pride of your knowledge. Teach as did the Lord, with humility and with authority, because you practice what you teach.

Encouragement – perhaps the greatest pillar of all, because your priesthood allows you to be with people when they are most vulnerable, when they are hurting. The priest sees a side of his parishioners that they prefer to hide from all others. This is why we call the Holy Spirit "Paraclete," because he comforts in the inner chambers of the human heart. Always be mindful of how God Himself would treat the person whose pain and shame is before you.

Generosity – let everyone see and know that your gift to them is given with liberality and with an open heart.

Leadership – the word in Greek is "προϊστάμενος" – and we all ready have Father Steve. But for every priest it means that you lead by example, by the efforts you make every day to serve, and not to be served.

And finally, Mercy – because the only way we approach this Altar and celebrate the Mysteries of God is by His mercy. Therefore, the Apostle commends that we be merciful to one another – not begrudgingly, but happily and joyfully, because we are conscious of our own failings, and we know that God has been merciful to us.

Therefore, the quintessential prayer of every priest is:

Ὁ Θεὸς ἱλάσθητί μοι τῷ ἁμαρτωλῷ…

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God be merciful to me, a sinner …

Beloved Deacon,

Let these pillars sustain you and support you for a long a fruitful ministry.

Let them be the hallmark of your priesthood, and of your service to the Body of Christ.

For as we will pray soon after your ordination, in the first moment that you hold in your hands the precious Flesh of the Lord:

Receive this Divine Trust, and guard it until the Second Coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, at which time He will demand It from you.

May the Lord always make you worthy of this Sacred and Divine Trust, and make of your ministry, true and lasting Pillars in the House of His Holy Wisdom. Amen.

[1] Cf. Psalm 140:2 (LXX).

[2] John 19:23.

[3] Romans 12:7-8.

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