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Address at the Ordination to the Priesthood of Deacon Bartholomew Mercado



His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros of America
Address at the Ordination to the Priesthood of Deacon Bartholomew Mercado
Saint Barbara Greek Orthodox Church
Toms River, New Jersey
December 11, 2021

Beloved Deacon Bartholomew,

At this moment, you stand before the Holy Altar, in the presence of the Pleroma of the Church. All the ranks of the Priesthood are here, together with the laity. And you stand in your diaconal robes – to which you have brought honor and dignity through your ministry – ready to receive, from my humble hands, the great gift of becoming a Presbyter of God's Holy Church. Today, your Orarion is transfigured into the Epitrachelion, which symbolizes the yoke of service and obedience to Christ. As the Lord Himself said:

Ἄρατε τὸν ζυγόν μου ἐφ᾽ ὑμᾶς καὶ μάθετε ἀπ᾽ ἐμοῦ, ὅτι πρᾷός εἰμι καὶ ταπεινὸς τῇ καρδίᾳ, καὶ εὑρήσετε ἀνάπαυσιν ταῖς ψυχαῖς ὑμῶν· ὁ γὰρ ζυγός μου χρηστὸς καὶ

τὸ φορτίον μου ἐλαφρόν ἐστιν.

Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me; for I am meek and lowly of heart, and you shall find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light.[*]

Could there be any more perfect invitation to the Priesthood? The Great High Priest calls you, my beloved Deacon. He calls you to accept His yoke that binds you to Him. He calls you to learn from Him – from His patience, His mercy, His forbearance, His compassion and His love.

He calls you to learn from His example – an example of meekness, gentleness and the willingness to be lowly of heart, which means to shun pride, and embrace humility.

We are approaching the Holy Nativity, when the Lord condescended to be born in a Cave, and laid in a Manger for our salvation. How the Angels must have marveled to behold the Creator of all take such a lowly place in His own creation!

Therefore, my beloved Deacon, think of those Angels when you serve, when you minister, when you preach, when you teach and when you perform your duties in the Church. What will they see in you? Will they marvel to behold a true yokefellow of the Lord? It is my fervent and sincere prayer that they will! Indeed, should you imitate our Lord Jesus Christ in your Priesthood, you will have a restful soul. For truly, His yoke is easy, and His burden is light. Because whatever challenges you will face, whatever obstacles you will be called to overcome, the Lord has already overcome them all. As He said:

Ἐγὼ νενίκηκα τὸν κόσμον!

I have conquered the world! [†]

Therefore, my dear Bartholomew, take courage as you take this decisive and far-reaching step in your personal and ecclesiastical life. You bear the name of the great Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew. His humility and devotion – in being yoked to the vast responsibilities of the Throne of Constantinople – are a shining light for all of the world to see. And in sharing his name, you must bear his demeanor and manner as well.

Your very name will be a constant reminder to you of the very best in serving the Church as a Priest. There is no finer exemplar of what it means to serve the Church than His All-Holiness – as we witnessed just weeks ago, when we were graced with his Apostolic presence.

I know that your devotion to our Patriarch is genuine and most sincere. Therefore, I enjoin you to always look to his example and be inspired by him. Think of him as being your own yokefellow, who will bear your burdens with you, so that you may serve Christ and His Church in purity of heart and with effective spiritual purpose.

If you receive the yoke of the Epitrachelion today with an heart open, good will and pure intention, you will be graced to live as a priest with a peaceful mind – one that rests upon the Lord, trusts in the Lord, and leans to His understanding. [‡]

Now, come and receive His Divine Yoke of the Holy Priesthood. And be forever bound to Christ through the joy of ministry, which, by grace, is in truth, easy and light.

[*] Matthew 11:29.

[†] John 16:33.

[‡] Cf. Proverbs 3:5.

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