10/01/2022

Address on Ordination to the Priesthood of Deacon Elias Pappas



Beloved Deacon Elias,

Today, you stand before the Holy Altar, surrounded by those who love you, to receive ordination to the Holy Presbyterate. It is a day that follows the culmination of the Twelvetide with the solemnities attending the Baptism of our Lord Jesus Christ – His Epiphany as the Son of God, and the Theophany of the Holy Trinity.

Therefore, it seems meet and right, that you, Deacon Elias, be ordained in this Cathedral of the Triune God, as you are both the son of a priest, and godson to an Archbishop.

This, truly, is the day that the Lord has made! Let us rejoice and be glad in it! [*]

For me, this is a most happy occasion – to behold you entering the fullness of the priesthood at this sacrament through the laying on of hands.

It brings me further joy to see your father and all your brother clergy here to welcome you into this fraternity of faith, devotion, and service to the Lord and His holy Church.

This auspicious day falls on the Saturday after Theophany, and you — in your role

as a deacon — read the Gospel of this special Liturgy. In today's Gospel reading, you heard of the temptations which the Lord allowed after His Forty-Day Fast in the wilderness. There is a lesson for you and for every priest in this περικοπή, for the life of a priest is filled with self-denial, as well as with temptation.

The denial of the self that we witness in the Fasting of the Lord, is all the worldly opportunities that you will miss, because you are a servant of the sacred, not a seeker of the secular.

The temptations that the Lord experienced – of deprivation, of self-display, and of power – these will come your way, too. The Lord countered them with purity, with humility, and with spiritual power. And in every case, He commenced with τό γέγραπται – "it is written!"

Here is a most profound teaching for you and for every clergyman: being grounded in the Holy Scripture — as well as maintaining an ecclesiological phronema and being Christocentric in our lives. But we see that Christ did not just quote the Scriptures like some retort to an argument or throwing a spiritual saying around like a sword.

In speaking the words of the Torah to the Accuser, the Lord was teaching all of us to take the inner meanings of the Scripture text to heart. And thus, we fulfill the prophecy of Jeremiah:

Διδοὺς δώσω νόμους μου εἰς τὴν διανοιῶν αὐτῶν,

καὶ ἐπὶ καρδίας αὐτῶν γράψω αὐτούς….

I will put My laws into their minds,

and I will write them upon their hearts…. [†]

Τό γέγραπται – to say, "It is written" — is for us to inscribe the words of God upon our hearts. It is to incarnate the words of God in our lives, and to sew them into the very fabric of our souls.

Τό γέγραπται is so much more than knowing how to say a text. It is the lived experience of the text. One could say it is the ineffability of the text – a seeming contradiction, but in truth a deep mystery.

My beloved Deacon Elias:

As a priest, you will have the great gift and the greater responsibility to give voice

to the prayers of the Church, even to utter the very words of the Institution of the Holy Eucharist.

I tell you now – it is not enough to only speak them. They are to be engraved on your heart, as a memorial and monument unto the Lord. The Lord will accomplish this in you, if you will but allow Him to. He will take the words of Holy Scripture, of the Liturgy, of the hymns and praises of the Church, and will inscribe them in your mind and on your heart.

Then, strengthened by the real experience of the Faith, your priesthood will be able to withstand the temptations and the privations that you may face in your life as a priest. But know this, the Lord will always be at your side, and we, your brotherhood in Christ, will always stand with you in solidarity and support.

Therefore, come now to the Holy Altar and open your heart like a tablet. Receive the word of the Lord in your mind, your soul, your very being. And be enrolled in the priesthood, to the glory, honor, and worship of God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Γένοιτο!

[*] Psalm 117:24 (LXX).

[†] Jeremiah 38:33 (LXX), 31:33 in the Hebrew; also cf. Hebrews 10:16.

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