

17/04/2019

## **Eastern Diocese Clergy Confession and Seminar in Philadelphia**



From April 3 - 4, 2019 the St. Nicholas Serbian Orthodox Church of Philadelphia was honored with a blessing from His Grace, Bishop Irinej, to host (for the first time in the parish's history) the annual Diocesan Clergy Confession and Seminar. Along with His Grace, Bishop Irinej, brethren clergy from throughout our Diocese and clergy from sister Orthodox churches, it was a particular pleasure to host our honored guest speaker - His Grace, Bishop John (Abdalah) of the Antiochean Orthodox Diocese of Worcester and New England.



The Seminar began with the Great Lenten Hours and Typica, which were celebrated by V. Rev. Fr. Zoran Radovic of St. George Serbian Orthodox church in Elizabeth, NJ. In continuation, the Presanctified Divine Liturgy was celebrated by His Grace, Bishop Irinej, with V. Rev. Fr. Emmanuel Pratsinakis (retired, Greek Orthodox Archdiocese), V. Rev. Fr. Zoran Radovic, V. Rev. Fr. John Parker (Academic Dean of St. Tikhon's Theological Seminary), V. Rev. Milan Dragovic (St. Nicholas church, Johnstown, PA.), Rev. Hieromonk Maxim (Ilic - New Marcha Monastery, Richfield OH.), Rev. Hieromonk Nektarije (Tesanovic - St. Geroge church, Lorain OH.), Fr. Vjekoslav Jovicic (St. Tikhon's Seminary) Protodeacon Milos Zdralic (Diocesan Financial Secretary) and Rev. Deacon Borjan Gligorevic (St. Nicholas church, Steelton PA.). Responses and readings were chanted alternatively in Serbian by Protodeacon Jovan Antic (Diocesan Educational Secretary), V. Rev. Fr. Aleksandar Vljakovic (St. Sava church, Boston MA.), V. Rev. Djokan Mestrovic (St. John the Baptist church, Paterson NJ.) and V. Rev. Milan Dragovic, and in English by Rev. Fr. Christopher Rocknage (St. Nicholas church, Steelton) and V. Rev. Fr. Milorad Orlic. During the services, Hieromonk Maxim (Ilic) and V. Rev. Fr. Rodney Torbic served as father-confessors for the clergy and laity.

The twilight of the day, the quiet chanting, the church filled with visiting clergy and a large number of lay members of the parish enhanced the magnificence and



sacredness of the Hierarchical Presanctified Divine Liturgy. For most of the laity this was their first experience of an Hierarchical Presanctified Divine Liturgy, and all later spoke of its beauty and grandeur. A particularly poignant moment was during the Communion of the Clergy when the church-school children, under the direction of Popadija Milena Orlic, sang “Save O God Thy People, Save O Lord” (Спаси Боже Људи Твоје, Спаси Господи...) In addition to the clergy, a good number of laity (especially children) partook of Holy Communion. His Grace, our Bishop Irinej, delivered a most edifying homily, emphasizing that in the dimness and quietness of the Great Lenten services we learn to “Be still, and know that I Am God...” (Ps. 46:10). Also, just as one cannot fully appreciate the light if he has not known darkness, so we cannot fully appreciate the glorious light of Christ’s Resurrection (The Pascha) unless we have followed Him, through the Great Lenten services, in the darkness of His passion, crucifixion, death and burial.



Following the distribution of the Antidoron, all present proceeded to the hall for a wonderful dinner prepared by the Circle of Serbian Sisters “St. Petka”, lead by their diligent President, Ivana Stevcic. Because tomorrow was a school day, on behalf of the church-school children, whom His Grace had invited to be His guests as part of the one hundredth anniversary of the flying of the Serbian flag over the White House (and other government buildings) during World War One, Sophia Markovic presented a special gift to His Grace – a picture of the visit of the Serbian Military

Mission, in the company of then Secretary of State Edward Lansing, to Mt. Vernon, Virginia in 1918. His Grace joyously accepted this gift, thanking the children for helping Him a record for the most guests for a guest chaplain to the House of Representatives with 84 guests. His Grace had been told by staff for the House of Representatives that as guest chaplain, He was allowed twelve guests. His Grace edified all present on the importance of then Secretary of State Lansing and other figures in the picture who enabled the very survival of Serbia both during, and after, World War One.

Following dinner, all present listened attentively to Bishop John's lecture on "Christ: The Exemplary Confessor". His Grace said there are three types of Confessor: He who offers the confession, He who hears the confession and He who is martyred for Christ, but survives the attempt. His Grace emphasized that it requires unshakable faith and trust in God for all three types. Trust is the foundation for all confessing – trust in Christ and His love for us. This enables us to deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow Him. This, in turn, enables us open ourselves to Him and reveal all our vulnerabilities in Holy Confession. His Grace exhorted that we who are father-confessors need to learn to listen to those coming to us in Holy Repentance; the tendency of father-confessors to spend more time talking than the penitent is detrimental to a healthy relationship of father-confessor and spiritual child. His Grace pointed out that if we spend all of our time inquiring or discussing with the penitent, we will not allow them the opportunity to bring up what sins are truly weighing on their souls. Bishop John then engaged the clergy in a question and answer session – hearing from the clergy the most commonly asked questions and comments they hear from penitents, and offering new perspectives with which clergy and approach such situations. After a lengthy, but highly enjoyable and edifying session with Bishop John, the thanksgiving prayer was read and all retired for the evening.

On Thursday, the Seminar continued with the celebration of Matins. Toward the conclusion of Matins His Grace, our Bishop Irinej, assisted by V. Rev. Fr. Zoran Radovic, Hieromonk Fr. Maxim (Ilic), and Protodeacon Milos Zdralic served a Pomen for all departed Patriarchs of our Church, as well as all Metropolitans, Bishops, Priests and Monastics of the Diocese of Eastern America – those whose names are known to us, those forgotten due to an abundance of names, and those whose service and name is known only to God. Following the dismissal, all proceeded to the hall, where an abundant breakfast awaited them. After barley making an indent into the over abundant food served, His Grace Bishop Irinej summoned the Seminar to continue as many, including our special guest, had planes to catch. Bishop John's second session was entitled: "Hearing Confessions More Effectively". His Grace

expounded on how we need to gain insight into the root cause of a sinful symptom, rather than just treating the symptom superficially. This requires a more curative approach to the penitent, as opposed to a legalistic overview of a checklist of sins and epidermal remedies. Bishop John pointed out the only effective way we can direct the one confessing to a deeper awareness of the motivations is to assist them in modifying their behavior. Through carefully asking the right questions, we can aid the penitent to understand themselves better, empowering them to facilitate the change necessary to turn away from sin and turn towards God.

Following this inspirational session with Bishop John, the participants in the Seminar, after a pause, reconvened in the church for a panel discussion with the Bishops and Episcopal Deans on parish life. A lively discussion ensued regarding the tragic situation of the Orthodox Church in the Ukraine, the consequences of which have detrimentally affected our lives here; the forthcoming joyous celebration of the eight hundredth anniversary of the Autocephaly of the Serbian Orthodox Church which, on a national level, will take place in Libertyville, IL., as well as ideas on how we can celebrate this monumental event on a Diocesan level. Because His Grace, Bishop John, had to depart for the Airport, Fr. Milorad Orlic used the opportunity, on behalf of the parish, to present gifts to His Grace, Bishop John, for accepting to be our honored guest, and His Grace, Bishop Irinej, for entrusting the parish with the honor of hosting this event. Following Bishop John's departure, the panel discussion with more question and concerns by the clergy.

Following the conclusion of the discussion, all returned to the hall for yet another robust meal prepared by the Circle of Sisters. His Grace, Bishop Irinej, thanked Fr. Milorad, the Circle of Sisters, and all members of the St. Nicholas church of Philadelphia for accepting to host the Clergy Seminar, and for being such exemplary hosts. Following thanksgiving prayer, His Grace thanked all present for attending the Seminar, wished a safe journey back to their parishes and a joyful journey through the rest of the Great Lent to "Feast of Feasts" – The Resurrection of Our Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ.

Special thanks must be made to our devoted ladies of the parish – Ivana Stevcic, Popadija Milena Orlic, Mitra Bratic, Milena Jurcak, Stojana Lackovic, Dojna Russo, Andreja Simpson, Nevena Jovanovic, Ruzica Peric, Teodora Bakic, Jelena Ciric, Irina Baric, Zvezdana Stojmirovic, Natasha Markovic, Marina Lackovic, Diana Pjevac and Dushanka Keane – whose time and talents enabled the Clergy Seminar to be truly a memorable one. Special thanks to Nikola Zivkovic and Peter Glumac for their contributions.

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