

03/11/2022

## **Address On the Feast of Saint Elpidophoros the Martyr And the Ordination to the Diaconate of John Capones**



My beloved Sub-deacon John,

We have chosen this day to bring you into the brotherhood of the clergy, because it is the day when my ordained name found its way into the mind and heart of our Ecumenical Patriarch. My baptismal name was Ioannis, so I feel a certain solidarity with you at this moment. You shall retain your name, as is the tradition for married clergy. But in doing so, I exhort you to consider carefully the great Forerunner and Baptizer of our Lord Jesus Christ, whose name you bear.

For though he was a desert dweller – an Angel in the flesh and truly the Prince of all Monastics – John the Baptist was also the voice of one crying aloud in all deserts, the spiritually dry and barren places that continue to this very day. The technological deserts of the modern world contain many more temptations and dangers than those of the Judean wilderness, and even those of Scetis, Nitria, Pontos and Cappadocia. For the technological wilderness can deceive even the most discerning soul.

John the Baptist was the blood relative of our Lord Jesus Christ. As you know, their mothers were cousins. He was only six months older in the womb than the Lord, and he was set apart by his devout and pious parents for spiritual devotion to the Lord of Hosts. He was a great ascetic, who listened for the voice of the Lord in all aspects of life – from his rigorous discipline to the spiritual counsels he gave, and finally in the radical act of baptizing, so as to reveal the Son of God. But he did not know that it was to be his own cousin! He even said so in his own words – twice!

κάγω οὐκ ἤδριν αὐτόν, ἀλλ' ἵνα φανερωθῆ τῷ Ἰσραήλ, διὰ τοῦτο ἦλθον ἐγὼ ἐν τῷ ὕδατι βαπτίζων. ... κάγω οὐκ ἤδριν αὐτόν, ἀλλ' ὁ πέμψας με βαπτίζειν ἐν ὕδατι, ἐκεῖνός μοι εἶπεν· ἐφ' ὃν ἂν ἴδης τὸ Πνεῦμα καταβαῖνον καὶ μένον ἐπ' αὐτόν, οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ βαπτίζων ἐν Πνεύματι Ἁγίῳ.

Yet, I did not recognize him! Still, this was the reason I came baptizing with water, so that he would be revealed to Israel. ... Still, I did not know him! But the One who sent me to baptize with water said to me, “If ever you see the Spirit descend upon someone and abide with Him, that is the One Who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.” \*

For all his greatness, his mission, his asceticism and his prophetic spirit, he could not recognize the Messiah, without the revelation by the Father. This is truly a marvel!

Therefore, Beloved Sub-deacon John,

In the life of ministry that you are embarking on today, can you consider yourself greater than the one of whom the Lord has said:

Truly I say to you, among those born of women there has not arisen anyone greater than John the Baptist! †

Impossible! Yet the Lord also said:

Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. ‡

This is the paradox of service to the Lord of Glory. Our archetypes are so utterly magnificent; yet, we are called to exceed them by our works, even as the Lord said:

Amen, amen, I say to you, those who believe in Me – the deeds that I accomplish – they shall also do them and even greater ones, because I am going to My Father. §

How, then, do we solve this quandary? What is the formula for ministry that will always be pleasing in the eyes of the Lord? Well, the answer is so eminently

simple, and is given to us by the Baptist himself. When he was convincing his disciples to follow the new Rabbi, the One he had baptized in the river Jordan, he said to them:

Ἐκεῖνον δεῖ αὐξάνειν, ἐμὲ δὲ ἐλαττοῦσθαι.

He must increase and I must decrease. \*\*

This, my beloved John, will be the motto for your ministry from this

day forward. In all that you do, and in all that you say, the Lord must increase, and you must decrease.

It is the reason that Christmas is by the Winter Solstice, and the Birth of the Baptist by that of Summer. He is the Light; we are only reflections of His light. As His light grows stronger, we live in that light; or, as we say in the Doxology: ἐν τῷ φωτί σου ὀψόμεθα φῶς.

And if the light in you is the Light of Christ, then all who are illumined by your ministry will behold the Lord of Glory, and give Him thanks and praise, because you have offered the pure faith.

Therefore, enter now into the ranks of the Holy Priesthood, putting on the robes of a Deacon this day, and let the light of Christ so shine within you, that people may see your good work, and glorify our Father, Who is in Heaven. ††

Amen.

\* John 1:31-33.

† Matthew 11:11a.

‡ Matthew 11:11b.

§ John 14:12.

\*\* John 3:30.

†† Cf. Matthew 5:16.

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