

11/11/2022

Address By Deacon Michael Giavris to His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros At His Ordination to the Priesthood



Your Eminence,

It is with much gratitude and appreciation, praise and thanksgiving, to the Almighty and Triune God, that I stand here before You, ready to receive the grace of ordination through Your venerable hands once again.

The emotions that presently fill my heart are many — ranging from fear of the unknown and certainty of my unworthiness, to gladsome anticipation of entering into the second rank of the holy priesthood — something, of course, which, as Your Eminence already knows, has been a lifelong desire and childhood dream of mine. But all of these nervous sentiments, worries and anxieties are slowly dissipating, giving way to a calming and peaceful joy — which I can only assume to be but a very small foretaste and reassurance of the Lord's ineffable joy and inexpressible love. And it is toward this source of divine serenity and heavenly tranquility to which I seek to draw closer.

It has been an immense honor and profound privilege, Your Eminence, to serve You

and our Sacred Archdiocese as a deacon for almost three full years. This was a special duty, for which I am deeply grateful. The experience and knowledge that I have acquired during this time — both liturgically and administratively — has been invaluable and most beneficial to my continued formation and service in the Church. And I can only hope that my service as a deacon was pleasing to You and equal to the high expectations that were placed in me.

I am very appreciative of the opportunity You afforded me to travel across the United States with You, and to learn, as well as witness, firsthand the very beauties and riches of Orthodoxy in America. Our faith has grown and flourished throughout our many communities in this vast country of ours, and it was particularly instructive to see how our faithful from coast-to-coast practice Orthodoxy, as well as how they witness to the community-at-large based on local and regional needs. Having grown up and spent most of my years in cities and communities where there is a strong Hellenic-Christian presence, as well as deep religious, cultural and ancestral ties to our Greek motherland — such as in Chicago, Boston and New York, but even abroad, too, in Tripoli and Thessaloniki — this newly-acquired awareness and understanding was most didactic, indeed.

Therefore, I would like to thank Your Eminence for graciously introducing me to this reality, because it is an experience that is unique to the deacons who have the honor and privilege to serve the Archbishop directly. I tried to the very best of my abilities to make the most of every opportunity presented to me for my spiritual edification and development. And I am filled with much delight in knowing that my successor, as well as all those who will follow him, will be presented with these very same opportunities for personal betterment and growth. Nevertheless, Your Eminence, when the time arrives, I am sure that my successor will be just as well-equipped as I am — if not more — through the tutelage, instruction and guidance of Your and our beloved Archdeacon, the Reverend Dionysios Papiris. I am verily grateful to have been placed by Your Eminence under his direct and capable care, and I am sure that many more deacons will benefit from this unique learning experience as well. I would be remiss, though, to not mention the Reverend Presbyter Eleftherios Constantine, too, for the special role he played during his time as Archdeacon and afterward in my diaconal service and formation. Thank you very much to the two of you, my good fathers, for all that you have offered to me personally. Please know that I will be eternally grateful to you both for your fraternal solidarity, kindness, guidance and support.

Your Eminence, in addition to thanking the venerable hierarchs present with us today, His Eminence Archbishop Demetrios, whom I served for six years at the

Archdiocese as a layman, and Their Graces Bishops Apostolos of Medeia and Athenagoras of Nazianzus — together with each and every clergyman and layperson, who are too many to enumerate individually — kindly permit me to express my abiding gratitude to them all collectively for their gracious and prayerful attendance. I am filled with great emotion by the knowledge of their love and support for me. And it is truly uplifting to know that their prayers will accompany mine in a prayerful fusion and entreaty to the Lord, beseeching His heavenly grace, compassion and mercy. Everyone here this morning has in some way impacted my life and service to the Church thus far — whether they know it or not. Therefore, I would like to respectfully request Your Eminence's permission, so as to thank some individuals in particular — to whom proper recognition must be accorded — and to share a couple of personal confessions with all of you before bringing my remarks to a close.

As you know, this Parish of Kimisis Tis Theotokou — the Greek Orthodox jewel and pride of Brooklyn — is a community that is very near and dear to me. I served here as a cantor for six years (from 2011 to 2017), while I was simultaneously employed at the Archdiocese as a layman in the Office of the Chancellor. So, you see, this parish is not simply a substitute or temporary home-away-from-home for me; it is my home. And to return here today for this significant moment in my young priestly ministry is truly humbling and moving. For I still bear vividly within my mind the many sweet and precious memories of my time here. The community itself is a very loving one, indeed. And this is manifest in their swift and unhesitating response to host this ordination. I must inform all of you that the preparations and accommodations we will enjoy here today are all due to the loving generosity and warm hospitality of the devout faithful of this church. Therefore, I extend to the entire community my utmost gratitude and appreciation for graciously hosting this special occasion and for underwriting in full the luncheon that will follow.

What I would like to make known publicly now for the first time is the very special nature of this day. While you may all know that I was given the name Michael by His All-Holiness our Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew back in February of 2020 at my ordination to the diaconate, what you do not know is that this was an intimate and private desire of mine for many years. Since my youth, I prayed to the Lord with the heartfelt entreaty that my name could one day somehow become Michael instead of George — unbeknownst to me, of course, that I would later follow the path of a celibate clergyman. And, as you can imagine, to my surprise, this very name was given to me at the age of 34.

Of course, I share this with all of you in an expression of gratitude to His All-Holiness, who, despite my silence on this matter — so as to ensure that it was something known only to God Himself, and to His heavenly Chief Commander, the Archangel Michael — His All-Holiness carried out this revelation of the Almighty's divine will through his loving and paternal Patriarchal gesture. Therefore, the nature of this day is brightened even more by the feast of my patron angelic host — a feast that is celebrated today by all Orthodox Christians throughout the entire oikoumene.

Your Eminence, just as how You graciously agreed to perform my ordination to the diaconate at my home parish of Saint Demetrios in the Holy Metropolis of Chicago, You have granted me once more the pleasure of fulfilling my request to have this ordination take place here today. However, I must apologize to our local clergy for not being able to accommodate all of them inside the holy altar. As you can understand, while it was mine and Fr. Damaskinos' desire to have all of our clergy serve, it was just not possible practically due to physical limitations in space. I am thankful nevertheless for your prayerful presence and participation, and I kindly ask for your understanding. Please know that I personally thought it would be best to give precedence to the clergy who have traveled here from afar, so that they, too, may enjoy the very special honor of serving together with our Archbishop — a privilege that I believe wholeheartedly in sharing with those around us whenever possible.

At this point, Your Eminence, I would like to recognize two, good friends of mine, the Very Reverend Grand Ecclesiarch Aetius (who is the Director of His All-Holiness' Private Patriarchal Office), and the Very Reverend Grand Syngellus Iakovos (who is the Director of the Ecumenical Patriarchate's English Office). I have known them, and they have known me, since we were laymen. And I thank them both for traveling here from the Queen of Cities and our All-Venerable Ecumenical Patriarchate in order to be with us. They both expressed a sincere desire to be here well before I even had the chance to invite them formally, and I thank His All-Holiness deeply for granting them his venerable Patriarchal blessing and permission to serve here today. I greatly appreciate the honor of their presence and extend to them a very heartfelt welcome to New York City.

Present with us this morning as well, we have Fr. Andrew Georganas — my former parish priest from Chicago — who has traveled here to be a part of this personal moment of happiness and delight. Fr. Andrew, thank you very much for your presence; you were instrumental in helping to organize my ordination to the diaconate a few years ago, and I am deeply grateful to you for the sacrifice you

made to come here today.

Together with these esteemed clergymen, Your Eminence, I would like to thank my friends, relatives, family, loved ones, schoolmates, classmates and coworkers, as well as all of our fellow clergy, esteemed Archons and beloved laity, for joining with us today in prayerful celebration and thanksgiving. I am profoundly humbled and greatly moved by this honorable turnout of brothers and sisters in the Lord — who, at the very first news of my forthcoming ordination, put aside their duties and obligations in order to share in the wonderful joy of this day. Of course, to those who traveled from afar, from out of state and even from abroad, please know that I deeply value the sacrifices you made to be here today. And for those who were unable to attend, kindly know that we are undoubtedly united with one another during this moment in spirit and in the common bond of prayer.

Your Eminence, before I conclude my remarks, I wish to briefly thank one last group of important individuals. I would like to start off first by recognizing and thanking our esteemed chanters, who hastened to be here today in order to brighten this service with their melodic voices. But one person I cannot thank enough is the esteemed and much beloved protopsalti of this community, Dr. Demetrios Kehagias. Demetri and I chanted across from each other here at Kimisis for six whole years. And it was during this time that I was more intimately cultivated in the sacred wellspring of the Psaltic Art's precious riches and immeasurable treasures. The knowledge that I possess today in Byzantine Music was fine-tuned by this humble, yet leading, church musician, and I will remain ever grateful to him for that.

Next, Your Eminence, I would like to express my deep respect and gratitude to Fr. Damaskinos, this parish's presiding priest. For almost 40 years, Fr. Damaskinos has shepherded this community in a most exemplary fashion and set a high example as to how a clergyman should conduct his priestly and pastoral duties in his service to the community. The hallmarks of his ministry have been his priestly discretion, empathy, compassion, seriousness, devotion and swiftness to address any need that arises — be it pastoral, liturgical or administrative. But these are only just a few of his many God-given talents and qualities, though. The most striking for me has always been his silent, yet charismatic, leadership — never shying away from any challenge or adversity, regardless the magnitude. In looking up to Fr. Damaskinos all these years, if I could take one thing from him, it would be that — strong and silent leadership, always leading by example, and peeling away the layers to expose an even firmer resolve and deeper priestly resiliency in times of difficulty and hardship. Of course, I would be remiss in not mentioning the fact that

Fr. Damaskinos coordinated and spearheaded the preparations for this entire day. And this is something for which my parents and I are truly grateful.

Together with this inspiring example of a clergyman, Your Eminence, I must also thank the Reverend Protoperbyter Anargyros Stavropoulos, who has fashioned me since the earliest years of my youth into who I am today. Indeed, I am most grateful to the Lord for these two, colossal examples of what it means to be a priest of the Most High God. Having been under the wise tutelage of Fr. Anargyros for over thirty years, I have time and again reaped the fruits of his pastoral efforts, priestly wisdom and fatherly guidance. For me, he has always constituted the model of what a parish priest should be. And I owe so much to him — a debt I can never repay. The confidence that I possess today to step into the holy altar and receive the grace of ordination is only possible because of him. And I know that I will call upon his decades-long experience even more so moving forward.

Lastly, Your Eminence, I would like to address my dear parents, Alexandros and Maria — two, devout servants of the Lord — who have reared me in the faith with unwavering commitment and devotion. I owe everything that I have achieved in life to them. All of my accomplishments and successes are due to the life lessons I received from them, but also to the firm foundation that they have instilled in me. They adorned our household with the precious pearls and virtues of their hard work, piety, integrity, honesty, philanthropy, hospitality, dignity and nobility. They have never sought out any praise or commendation, publicity or recognition. Instead, they prefer to have their works known only by God — always willing to assist and support others silently in any way that they can. Their example is one of an aspiring saintliness and righteousness that all Christians are called to practice — and one that I am presently still learning. They have remained by my side every step of the way, strengthening me and even aligning their own will to mine, so as to facilitate my dedication to the Church. And I must reiterate that I stand here today only because of their unwaning love and parental affection.

Together with them, I am thankful for still having in this life my beloved grandmother, Kondylia, who is 92 years old. My grandma is the one who first took me by the hand at the age of five and introduced me to the Church. Every year, I would accompany her to the divine services during my three-month stays in Tripoli for the duration of each school year's summer recess. And it was during this time that my love for the Church grew and took root. Her wish was always to see me ordained to the priesthood one day. Unfortunately, though, it is not possible for her to be here. Nevertheless, I know that she is joined with us in spirit and prayer, and she eagerly awaits my next visit to Chicago, as her request for some time now has

been to come to me for holy confession. Of course, with Your Eminence's paternal blessing and permission, I would like to respectfully ask that when this time arrives, I will be allowed to fulfill this request of hers — making my grandmother's confession the very first that I ever hear.

And so, Your Eminence, I would like to end with an earnest, personal pledge to serve the Lord, His Holy Church and His Flock to the very best of my abilities. I will do whatever I can to minister to the needs of our Sacred Archdiocese and to fulfill the duties and responsibilities You entrust to me. I will always strive to be a faithful son of the Mother Church of Constantinople and of our beloved Ecumenical Patriarch. And I am ever grateful for the privilege and honor to remain by Your side and to continue to serve You, our Archbishop of America, in Your highly esteemed office. I thank You wholeheartedly for this blessed opportunity to progress in my priestly ministry and vocation, and I am thankful to You as well from the very bottom of my heart for deeming me worthy to begin serving within a parish setting. This life-long aspiration of mine has finally been brought to fruition by You. And I thank Your Eminence for opening this door to the heavenly beauties and splendor of the priesthood, as well as for continuing to oversee and contribute toward my overall priestly development, personal growth and spiritual formation.

Through the intercessions of the Holy Archangel Michael, Chief Commander of the Heavenly Hosts and all the Bodiless Powers. Amen.

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