

Address of Archbishop Elpidophoros of America At the Ordination of Alexander Gratsias to the Diaconate



Beloved Sub-deacon Alexander,

I am very moved by your decision to present yourself for ordination into the ranks of the clergy, especially because of your family history. Today, we welcome you in the first step, the Holy Diaconate. And in two weeks, we shall ordain you as a Presbyter at the Saint Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church and National Shrine at the World Trade Center.

The journey that you have traveled to come to this auspicious moment in your life in Christ has been “Odyssean.” It certainly did not require ten years to sail from Troy to Ithaki, but that is what Homer tells us. The fact is, that life rarely provides us with straight lines – the shortest distance between two points. But God knows what He is doing with us. Even our Lord traveled in interesting circuits, as when Scripture says that He had to travel through Samaria to get from Judea to

Galilee.[1] While this was not geographically true, there was a deeper truth awaiting us at the Well of Jacob, and the encounter with the Samaritan Woman.

For you, beloved sub-Deacon Alexander, your journey began before you were born. Your late and blessed father was one of the outstanding clergy of our Archdiocese, admired and respected by all. In truth, Father Manny, as he was known, founded one of the most successful parishes in the country – Holy Resurrection Church in Brookville, which had its beginnings in Glen Cove.

Your father was taken from you and your family, and from the Church he loved and served, far too soon. His intellect, drive, passion and ecumenical commitment are legendary, and you have inherited many of his gifts. But your mother, Presvytera Alexandra, is still with us, and we are as privileged by her presence, as you are gifted by her grace.

Together with your soon-to-be Diakonissa, Anna, your children, Alexandra and Angeliki, and the rest of your wonderful family, you stand before the Holy Altar of God and present yourself, as the Apostle says:

... a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God, your conscious, reason-endowed expression of your True Adoration. [2]

Your diaconal service will be a brief one, only two weeks, but it is an ontological change in your spiritual life. You enter into this first of the threefold step of the Priesthood of our Lord Jesus Christ. Never forget the original qualifications for the Diaconate and its root cause.

You see, the Order of Deacons was established because certain widows were being neglected in the daily provisions – a prejudice against their Gentile origin. Therefore, the Apostles selected seven men:

... ἄνδρας ἐξ ὑμῶν μαρτυρουμένους ἑπτὰ, πλήρεις Πνεύματος Ἁγίου καὶ σοφίας....

... seven men of you well testified of, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom....[3]

My dear sub-Deacon Alexander,

These three qualifications have never changed. The first is a life of good repute, of good testimony, and of good witness. We know that the Holy Proto-Martyr Stephanos – the First Witness of the Church, and whose name means “crown – embodied these qualities as the first of the Seven First Deacons.

Second, is the awareness of the Holy Spirit, described as “fulness” – the fruit of a

spiritual life and lifestyle.

And finally, wisdom is the third, which includes prudence, discretion and, above all, openness to the Wisdom of God, Who is our Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

These are the marks of a Deacon, and we can see them present in you. Your path has twisted and turned, like Odysseus, but it was always paved for you by your beloved father, the Protopresbyter Emmanuel. His memory will continue to guide you and inspire you to serve, love, and believe as he did.

Therefore, enter into the ranks of the Holy Priesthood, putting on the robes of a Deacon this day, with gratitude and gladness. Never let the marks of the Diaconate leave your person. For they are the same qualities that your ever-memorable father brought to his Priesthood, and they will sustain you for the rest of your life, which we pray is long and of great spiritual profit for you, your family, and the Church.

Amen.

[1] Cf. John 4:3-4.

[2] Romans 12:1.

[3] Acts 6:3.

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