

10/07/2023

ADDRESS By His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros of America At the Ordination to the Priesthood of Deacon Nicholas Anton



My beloved Deacon Nicholas,

You see how you are surrounded by your spiritual fathers and mentors and many, many clergy. We are all here today because of you, to welcome you into the ranks of the Presbyters of the Church.

This step is a logical progression in your spiritual journey. You have ministered in the Church in so many ways for so many years. As a young man, you went to the Phanar and served the Ecumenical Patriarchate, assisting the English language ministry of the Mother Church, and her mission for environmental responsibility. I remember you from those days, for your demeanor was always helpful and humble.

You labored at the Sacred Archdiocese of America, in the Office of Inter-Orthodox, Ecumenical and Interfaith Affairs, which is where I found you when I arrived on these blessed shores as Archbishop. And you have finally come to rest – not from your labors, but from your travels – as a director for the Assembly of Bishops.

All of these things you achieved as a layman. But then, you advanced into the ranks of the clergy. Knowing you as I do, I understand that your decision to embrace the life of our Lord's Holy Priesthood is not based in egotistical aspiration, but in a genuine desire to serve the people of God with love and compassion.

Today, you come to the Presbytery, and you enter a new phase of your service. As a priest of the Most High God, you are called to offer the bread that is spoken of in the Didache, the Teaching of the Twelve Apostles:

Even as this broken bread was scattered over the hills, and was gathered together and became one, so let Your Church be gathered together from the ends of the earth into Your kingdom; for Yours is the glory and the power through Jesus Christ forever.[*]

This ancient prayer expresses a sublime truth about your various ministries in the Church through the decades. You are a gatherer, one who brings people together. Whether in the interreligious community, or the ecumenical Christian world, or in the realm of Inter-Orthodox relations, you, my good Deacon, are called to gather together that which has been separated.

For what is separated by harsh language, can be joined by gentle speech.

And what is separated by wrongdoing, can be brought together by forgiveness.

What is separated by suffering, can be healed by compassion.

And what is separated by animosity, can be bridged by love.

My beloved Deacon, you are called to be a gatherer – a priest who brings into one of those things, which before had been apart. For our God is the “One Who gives life to the dead, and calls things that are not, as though they are!”[†]

You expand your ministry this day, by taking on the awesome responsibility of the celebration of the Divine Liturgy. For it is through the remembrance of our Lord Jesus Christ in the Eucharist, as Saint Paul says, that “those who were once far away become close by the Blood of Christ. [‡]

Thus, you will stand before the Holy Altar, and bring your every intention to the work of reconciliation – first of the human family with God, and then of the human family with one another. For neither can be truly accomplished, unless both are.

As your priestly life evolves, allow the consciousness of rapprochement and conciliation – a consciousness that you have witnessed first-hand in the sacred person of His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew – and encourage it to grow and embrace all that you think, all that you do, and all that you say. And you will see that when we gather up our fragmented world, we will always have more than we could have ever imagined. [§]

Therefore, my beloved Deacon Nicholas,

Ascend now into the Holy Altar, as if it were the hills where the grain grows and is gathered into the one true loaf of Divine Bread. And join your fathers and brothers in the high priestly ministry of reconciliation and peace, which is in the Order of Melchizedek, led by our Lord Jesus Christ, our Great High Priest – to Whom is due all glory, honor and worship; together with His Eternal Father and the Co-Eternal and Life-giving Spirit; now and ever, and unto the ages of ages.

Amen.

Photo: St. Basil Church, Chicago/Mary Peroulas

[*]The Didache, chapter 9.

[†]Romans 4:17.

[‡]Ephesians 2:13.

[\$]Cf. Matthew 14:20.

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