

Deacon Stefan Djoric ordained to the Holy Priesthood



On June 2nd, 2019, His Grace Bishop Irinej presided over the celebration of the Divine Liturgy at the Holy Resurrection Serbian Orthodox Church in Steubenville, Ohio. During the Liturgy of this last Sunday after Pascha, Bishop Irinej ordained the Reverend Deacon Stefan Djoric to the Holy Priesthood.

Fr. Stefan Djoric recently graduated from St. Vladimir's Seminary and, through his ordination, is now appointed as the new parish priest of the Holy Resurrection Church in Steubenville, succeeding Fr. Rade Merick, who recently retired.

The Liturgy was made even more beautiful by the voices of the Petar Krstich Choir and an inspired sermon by Bishop Irinej who pointed out the importance of communal effort in maintaining the rich spiritual vineyard which Fr. Merick has left behind as his legacy. His Grace also encouraged the new priest, Father Stefan Djoric together with his wife, Marina, to never stop growing spiritually with his

community, and to always seek the Kingdom of Heaven first. Before his ordination during the Liturgy, Fr. Stefan offered a short sermon in the Church which will be attached in this article in its entirety.

Steubenville's new Popadija is Marina nee Thetford, daughter of Gregory and Juliana nee Hopko, and is the granddaughter of Fr. Thomas and Matushka Anne Hopko, and the great granddaughter of Fr. Alexander and Matushka Juliana Schmemmann.

In addition to the many guests and family present, as Bishop Irinej noted, a very important guest is here present, representing yet another family to which Thetfords and Hopkos belong, and now Fr. Stefan as well, the Most Venerable Mother Abbess Christophora of Holy Transfiguration Orthodox Monastery, where Stefan was ordained to the Holy Diaconate.

Following the Festal Liturgy, the Agape Meal followed where all the clergy and faithful that had gathered enjoyed traditional Serbian food.

Fr. Stefan's Sermon in the liturgy:

Responding to the Bishop Irinej's inquiry, "What do you seek, beloved son, from our hands?"

Deacon Stefan, replied:

"I seek ordination into the holy priesthood, Your Grace. I seek to serve others not to be served, to love and expect nothing in return, to give and encourage and if necessary, to lay down my life for the flock given to me by God. By seeking ordination into the priesthood I also seek wholeheartedly that I diminish, myself, and let Christ increase in me until I can say with the apostle that No longer I live but Christ lives within me. I surrender myself to God's will and I accept what is about to be conferred upon me as a gift of the Holy Spirit.

"When I was in elementary school, I used to think that serving others is a kind of burden. One of my grandmothers likes to say, I was a lazy grandson. I liked to be stuck in theory and contemplation of all types, of course, not the one of Jesus prayer and spiritual life. My primary concern from the age 7 to age 11 were mostly sweets and video games. However, my spiritual boyhood came to an end when one day, my father asked me to memorize our father and several other prayers. Since I saw that as a shortcut to me getting whatever I wanted as a boy, I learned what my father told me, and I prayed every single day. I was surprised that God does not like video games because my prayer did not get me any, but I did get some sweets

from time to time and mostly from my grandmothers. However, till this very day, I am not sure if that was God's doing, or if those sweets were some competition between my grandmothers to win the love of my brother Milos and myself when we were little boys. Nonetheless, God used my honest but straightforward prayer to get what I thought was useful for me and transformed it a bit by bit into something that I could never believe would happen and it happened in high school.

"When I was in high school as an experienced basketball player I say experienced (since I started playing basketball since the age of 6), one day I read an amazing work by Nicholai Velimirovich called "Prayers by the Lake". I was struck at the wisdom of Nicholai given the fact that I never read anything about him, nor heard of him. In one of those prayers, Nicholai wrote that God is always young because he serves others! God's joy is to serve others and we all recall the words of the Gospel that the son of man did not come to be served but to serve others! The thought of me being similar to Christ in his service started growing in my heart so much that it affected my basketball career. After reading Nicholai Velimirovich, I started reading the Bible more and more, and even my basketball coach noticed that something changed. I stopped being a guy who would trash talk to people, or elbow them. Instead of stepping at the head of lying down opponent player and then dunking I would stop and offer my hand so that the person can get up. What struck me the most was the comment of my coach who said one day that I should not pretend that I am Jesus on the basketball court but to go back and be the old me. Of course, at this point, that was an impossibility. I felt that I started diminishing and let God grow within me and work wonders in his servant who was about to lose his basketball career for throwing himself into the hands of God without knowing what is next for him.

"Towards the end of high school, I felt a strong desire to study theology and to dedicate my life to God. I started learning to chant obsessively and I read the lives of the Saints. In those days when I was working on this, It did not take a lot of time for me to understand that my desire to dedicate my life to God was the strongest impulse of my being and I had to act on it. So I did! I started studying theology in Belgrade and through four years of college, I had formed myself not only through lectures of great professors but also by spending every summer at the Holy Mountain in Greece where I was taught how to serve others. To my professors and to all those great monks who accepted to share the secrets of spiritual life to me on this day when I am about to enter into the service they prepared me for, I say thank you!

"By recommendations of my professors from Belgrade, I came to St. Vladimir's

Seminary where I spent three years of my life being additionally formed spiritually and academically. In New York, I met his Grace Bishop Irinej who exemplified how a great preacher and the servant of the altar should act, pray and love! Bishop Irinej, while he was in his mother's womb, received a blessing from Nicholai Velimirovich. On this day I ask both his Grace Irinej and St. Nicholai to keep my wife and myself in their prayers eternally. In the US I also met my lovely wife Marina, my partner in love and spiritual life who through her unselfish giving of herself to me exemplified how the best wife in the world should act and by that she showed me the path of service to others in the best way possible. I am also thankful to her family, particularly to her parents Gregory and Juliana who are always prayerfully and lovingly with us.

"I am thankful to my father Srdjan and my mother Biljana, who formed my brother Milos and myself and taught us how to be good Christians. To all other members of my family, I am also thankful for their prayers and kindness of heart and their spiritual presence at this sacred moment of my ordination to the priesthood. To my spiritual father Iakovos of Simonopetra, who is probably watching this ordination live, through the Holy Spirit I say the time has come father, pray for your son!

"To this wonderful community and Fr. Rade Merick and Protinica Donna who are helping and helped my wife and myself to feel accepted and loved, I say thank you from the bottom of my heart! I would not be standing here without you and your prayers!

"Finally, you remember the grandmother I mentioned at the beginning who said that I was a lazy boy? She is now running around saying that her son will be ordained a priest and, as every grandmother would say for her grandson, she says that her grandson will be the best priest in the world. I strongly believe that this is my best recommendation to be ordained.

"Your Grace, my heart is ready! May it be to me according to your word!"





spc.rs