

18/09/2023

Archbishop Elpidophoros of America Archiepiscopal Exhortation at the Enthronement of Metropolitan Apostolos of New Jersey



Your Eminence, Metropolitan Apostolos of New Jersey, beloved brother in the Lord,
Your Eminence, Metropolitan Kyrillos of Rhodes, Most Honored Representative of
the Mother Church of Constantinople,
Your Eminences, Most Reverend and Beloved Brothers of the Holy Eparchial Synod,
Your Eminences and Graces, Concelebrants in the Holy Spirit,
Very Reverend and Reverend Clergy,
Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Today is a Day of Joy and a Cause of Rejoicing for the Sacred and God-Saved Metropolis of New Jersey! For by the holy act of His All Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew and the Holy and Sacred Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, we are gathered today to enthrone the Ruling Hierarchy of this Ecclesial Domain, His Eminence Metropolitan Apostolos of New Jersey. ΑἱΙΟΣ!

But this most happy occasion has a slight sting for me, because I was so very honored and pleased to be your Patriarchal Vicar for the Metropolis, during the vacancy of the Throne of New Jersey. But I know that the friendships I have made here will endure and grow, because of the close and long friendship your new Metropolitan and I have had for decades.

Beloved Brother, Metropolitan Apostolos:

You have heard the message of His All Holiness

You are blessed by the Metropolitan of your native Rhodes, who honors you as his representative of the Mother Church of Constantinople.

You have received so many congratulatory wishes from brother Hierarchs and clergy, present and absent. You have been embraced by the pious and good people of this Metropolis, whom you have served in your episcopal capacities for over two years as Archiepiscopal Vicar, with dignity and with devotion.

And now, Dear Brother in the Lord, you will assume – for the first time in your episcopal service – the full mantle of responsibility for a local Church – in this case, the Sacred Metropolis of New Jersey. This is your vocation and calling in the Lord, one to which you have aspired with humility and grace, and one that you will indubitably serve with honor.

You can have no greater inspiration for your new role than the sacred person of our Ecumenical Patriarch, who with a calm and steady hand on the holy rudder of the Church, guides the Ark of our Salvation in Christ through the narrow and dangerous channels of the modern world.

With a Scylla of bellicosity and aggression from Moscow on the one side, and a Charybdis of self-styled experts who would drag the Church down into an endless whirlpool of useless debates, His All Holiness steers the Church expertly, and with abiding love and compassion – especially for those who would persecute him and the Mother Church.

Now, as a Metropolitan of the Ecumenical Throne in this Holy Eparchy of the Archdiocese of America, you are charged to even more so, and with greater intensity, to give your efforts to support and strengthen the purely spiritual mission of the Mother Church, as it is incarnated here in America, and in the Sacred Metropolis of New Jersey, of which you are now the spiritual father. And it is your fatherhood in Christ – at its very best imitative of our Ecumenical Patriarch, who himself strives to reflect the Father of Lights in Heaven – to which I now turn, by way of a fraternal exhortation.

Beloved Brother, Metropolitan Apostolos: You have been called to serve the faithful Orthodox Christians of the Metropolis of New Jersey in this place and at this time. You are to be the spiritual father of both the clergy and the laity. And our Lord Jesus Christ has given to us – His Bishops – the key to understanding our awesome responsibilities. In chapter five of the *Liber Regulae Pastoralis*, the “Book of Pastoral Rule,” by Saint Gregory the Great, in his classic, he describes us as those who fulfill the prototype of the Levirate Marriage, where the brother must marry the wife of his deceased brother, and raise up children unto his name.

We read about the strange custom of the Levirate Marriage in the Gospel Reading for the Matins of Holy Tuesday. The Sadducees confront our Lord with the story of the woman who married seven brothers. They try to entrap Him with their legal arguments, and are stupefied when the Lord gives His accusers His final pronouncement:

“He is not the God of the dead, but of the living!”*

What a magnificent ending to this story! Christ is the Elder Brother Who willingly dies for us, but as the One Risen from the dead, He empowers our ministries to raise up children to His Glorious Name. What a privilege for us, dear Brother, to be granted this special grace.

And is s this not the very thing that we do? We, who, as Bishops, are the younger brothers of the One Who gave Himself up for the life of the world? Do we not raise up children in His Holy Name, calling them, “Christians,” when they come up from the Fountain of Baptism, which is the matrix, the womb, of the Church?

And do we not rear them in the family of the Church? Where they are nourished at the Divine Liturgy through the Most Holy Body and Precious Blood of the Lord – the spiritual food that grants remission of sins and leads us to eternal life.

This is your Archpastoral ministry, dear Brother. To raise up spiritual children – like newly planted olives trees – in every parish of your God-protected Metropolis.

You have the magnificent example of the spiritual father of us all, His All Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew – to inspire you when you are weary and even discouraged.

You have our unconditional support and love, and the same from all those who are in attendance today, and who are united with us in prayer around the world.

And you have these pious faithful of the Metropolis who have high expectations for your ministry among them. And I know that they shall not be disappointed. You shall be a good shepherd to this flock, in imitation of the Elder Brother and the Great Shepherd, our Lord Jesus Christ.

Through His love for humankind, may you always attain the worthiness of your High Office.

Therefore, receive this Staff of God’s Holy Power – this Πάβδων Δυνάμεως – by which you will guide your flocks with love and compassion, with mercy and forgiveness, to the ever-flowing springs of Divine Grace where they shall drink to their salvation, and the Safe and Sacred Pastures of the Pure Orthodox Faith of Christ, where they shall be fed and nourished.

Αἰῖος!

* Matthew 22:32.

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