

16/10/2023

Archbishop Elpidophoros Archiepiscopal Exhortation at the Installation of Bishop Theofan of Philomelion



Your Grace, Bishop Theofan of Philomelion, Dear Brother in the Lord,

Your Eminence Concelebrant in the Holy Spirit,

Very Reverend and Reverend Clergy,

Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Today is a Day of spiritual sweetness, tinged with the memory your former Metropolitan, as we enthrone His Grace, Bishop Theofan of Philomelion, as the new leader and Archpastor of the Albanian Orthodox Diocese of the Americas.

I say sweet, because Bishop Theofan comes to serve the faithful and the purposes of this God-protected flock of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. And I say tinged with memory, because tomorrow you will observe the memorial for your former and blessed Hierarch, the late Metropolitan Ilia, who reposed one year ago, on the sixth day of this very month.

Therefore, beloved faithful, you see the mystery of our coming and going in this

world. You greet your new Bishop today, and you remember your former Hierarchy tomorrow. And you embrace both the memory of Metropolitan Ilia and the presence of Bishop Theofan with equal love. For their ministry is the one ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ, which is based in sacrifice and generosity, for the sake of all the brothers and sisters of the Church.

I wish to thank my beloved brothers: His Eminence Archbishop Nathanael for your prayerful presence today, for these sacred rites of the installation.

This Saint Nicholas Parish of the Albanian Diocese has had a remarkable history, sanctified by the miracle of the Weeping Icon of Blessed Virgin Mary, whom we behold in awe and gratitude. The late and ever-memorable Patriarch Dimitrios made a pilgrimage here on the first-ever Apostolic Visit of an Ecumenical Patriarch to the Western Hemisphere in 1990, as did His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, on his first Patriarchal Visit to the United States in 1997. These blessings are of enormous import for the Albanian Diocese of the Ecumenical Throne in America, and stand out as milestones in its spiritual development, its place in our Nation, and its own history.

Beloved Brother, Bishop Theofan:

You are now the inheritor of the enormous legacy enshrined in this magnificent Church and wonderful community.

You have been called by God to lead this flock, small as it may seem. But as the Lord has said, "Let the little flock not be afraid."* The small flock can have great influence on the Body of Christ, because you have the opportunity to be mindful at every level of Diocesan experience. For those of us who oversee expansive territories and manifold communities, there are only so many hours in the day to attend to the needs of each. For you, however, this is an opportunity to know and understand the Apostolic ministry of the Bishops of the first centuries of our Church, before the incredible multiplication occasioned by the Great Saints, Constantine and Helen.

Beloved Bishop, as the leader of the Albanian Community, you have a responsibility both here and overseas, where the Church of Albania was only restored under the Patriarchy of His All-Holiness Bartholomew.

It was he, who organized the revived Albanian Church.

It was he, who brought His Beatitude, Archbishop Anastasios, to the fore.

It was he, who negotiated the delicate relationships between the Greek-speaking minority and the Albanian majority.

Therefore, Bishop Theofan, you have a debt of honor and gratitude to His All-Holiness and the Holy and Sacred Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, which elected you and empowered you to minister to the Albanian Orthodox of America.

Again, you are small flock, but a tiny diamond is worth more than a pound of gold. Never allow the size of your jurisdiction to deter you from speaking out when you must, and acting with integrity.

I know that you will build solid and fraternal relations with the other Albanian presence in America. This is the Christian and proper thing to do, because even in your home country, the Orthodox Christian population remains a minority, in what was once an Orthodox land.

But we do not grieve over past injustices and the persecution that nearly extinguished the light of Orthodoxy in Albania. We believe in the True Light that enlightens every person coming into the world, Who shines on in the darkness, and can never be overcome by the darkness!†

So take pride in your inheritance and in your bishopric. This is your Archpastoral ministry, dear Brother. Care for all your spiritual children – wherever you shall find them.

You have the greatest example of all – His All Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew – to inspire you, when you are weary and even discouraged. And you have our unconditional support and love, and the same from all those who are in attendance today.

You shall be a good shepherd to this flock, in imitation of Great Shepherd, our Lord Jesus Christ.

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

Therefore, hold firmly your Staff, the Staff of God's Holy Power – the Πάβδων Δυνάμεως – by which you will guide your flock with love and compassion, so that they may graze on the pure nourishment of our Holy Orthodox Faith.

May your High Priesthood always be remembered in the Kingdom of God; now and forever, and unto the ages of ages. Amen.

AΞΙΟΣ!

* Luke 12:32.

† Cf John 1:9,5.

Photos: GOARCH

goarch.org