

ORDINATION OF HIS GRACE NEOPHYTOS BISHOP OF NITRIA

On Sunday 21 December 2014 His Beatitude Theodoros II, Pope and Patriarch of Alexandria and All Africa performed in the Holy Patriarchal and Cathedral Church of St Savvas the Sanctified the ordination of His Grace Neophytos Bishop of Nitria. Participating in the Eucharistic Gathering and the Ordination of His Grace were Their Eminences the Metropolitans Makarios of Kenya, Gabriel of Leontopolis, Patriarchal Vicar of Alexandria, as well as His Grace Meletios Bishop of Naukratis, Hegumen of the Holy Patriarcha; Monastery of St Savvas the Sanctified.

In his address His Beatitude emotionally said the following:

“Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and his name shall be called Emmanuel, which means God with us” (Matthew 1:23).

Your Grace Neophytos, elected Bishop of Nitria and my dear child in Christ.

Today, the Sunday before the Nativity of our Lord, our Holy Church, with the wisdom of our Fathers, ordered that the Gospel extract relating to the genealogy of the God Man’s origin as man. In other words, how God was incarnate, became a real man like us in everything, taking on our body, from the most pure blood of our Holy Virgin, and coming from the tribe of Judah, as a descendant of David and the rest of the Forefathers on the list. This was a prophecy which, though expressed by the mouth of the prophet Isaiah, runs through the entire Old Testament as an anticipation and an earnest expectation of all of mankind, and is the corner stone of the salvation of the new Israel, which is the Church of Christ. Because Christ, according to St Basil the Great, through His Incarnate presence among humanity, with that descent “from heaven”, “to the ultimate humility” took on all of man “from birth to the end”. (Homily on humility, 6). This is exactly what constitutes the salvation of all mankind. Salvation presumes the Incarnation and only with it is it attainable. This great truth, with simpler words, were taught by the recently proclaimed St Porphyrios the Kafsokalyvite, saying: “however great our fall and our bitterness from the other problems of life, we must never lose our inner joy, which we have, because Christ is alive and present in our lives”!

“God is with us”!

These simple words alone are enough to express the truth of the Gospel, to give wings to the Missionary, hope to the distressed, joy to the desperate, courage to the sick, meaning to the contemporary confused who battle not only with the psychological, stalemates.

Your Grace, my dear brother, Neophytos,

You were deemed worthy by the Hierarchs of the Holy Synod of our Holy Synod of the Ancient Patriarchate of Alexandria, after my proposal, to be ordained as a Hierarchy of the Holy Church of Christ. You were born and grew to manhood in Africa and now with the grace of God, you are sent out as a Hierarchy to minister to your people in Kenya, the people of Africa, as an auxiliary Bishop of the Pope and Patriarch of Alexandria, under the title of the ancient diocese of Nitria. I want you to remember a few things always, in as many years that the grace of God will grant you. You are becoming a Bishop because the Church exists. Without the Church we would have no value, however virtuous and educated we were. And something else, the Church owes us nothing, but we owe it everything. This is the component element of

our ministry and of our self-awareness as Bishops. In order to be truly "canonical" Bishops, we need to be Bishops of the Church within the Church.

And of course, "the gift is God's"! None of us becomes a Bishop by right, but by divine grace. St Paul the Apostle of the Nations says that "If anyone aspires to the office of Bishop, he desires a noble task" (1 Timothy 3:1). And some who are guileless take liberty and throughout life have as their goal, through lawful and illegitimate means, to become Bishops. They forget however, all that the Apostle orders of his disciple Timothy, "As for you, always be steady, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry", (2 Timothy 4:5) It is as if he is telling him in other words, do not seek a ease and a comfortable life, but prepare yourself for the torment. And indeed, it is then that our work as Missionaries is justified, when we give ourselves unconditionally to the will of the Lord, to His Holy Church. And from the height of the Cross to which we as Missionaries are dedicated, fixed on, we have no right to come down on our own, through our own will, but others will help us down as they did with Christ at the Deposition!.

In saying these things I do not want to frighten you, neither do I want to dishearten you. Indeed, on the contrary, I pray that our good God will grant you that grace and strength in your work, that you will justify the expectations of the Hierarchs who voted for you. Besides, you have shown examples of obedience and dedication to the Church, to our Patriarchate up till now, wherever you served with God's grace, and this is how you must continue. I know that you are a simple, humble, virtuous man. Make sure that you increase these virtues, because the Church, in the difficult years in which the grace of God has in store for us to endure, needs people of self-sacrifice, people with inspiration who can love and minister. Contemporary man has tired and become disillusioned by philosophies and theories. He needs a living example. This is your mission in Africa, the continent of the future.

And, living in a world that is constantly changing, with geometric progress, we are called on to preserve with all our strength, God's inspiration for His creation. And to finish where I started, God becomes man, "so that God could complete Adam" according to the hymn writer. We have been called on for a higher life "being concerned for things above" (Colossians 3:2). So, no matter what it takes, we must not lower the banner of the plan which God had for His creation "in image and likeness" , in other words, Theosis, and this enormous responsibility of spreading this Message, which Christ gives to you today through your ordination as Bishop.

God is with us!

My child Neophytos, enter into the joy of your Lord, and the God of love and peace, the God of eternal joy, will always be with you. Amen!

His Grace Neophytos replied:

"My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour; for he has regarded the low estate of his servant. Behold henceforth all generations will call me blessed. For he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name. And his mercy is on those who fear him" (Luke 1:46-49).

Your Beatitude Father and Master, Venerable Primate of the ancient Patriarchate of

Alexandria and All Africa,

I

n complete humility, allow me to address you in the name most honourable and glorious name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, Trinity one in essence and undivided.

Firstly, I stand before you only by the grace of the Most Holy Spirit, in complete unworthiness but with great humility, faith and love, ready to accept this formidable sacrament by your honourable and apostolic hands, in other words the third and supreme office of the priesthood as Bishop of the once brilliant Diocese of Nitria of the Throne of St Mark the Evangelist.

Your Beatitude Father and Master,

When we first met during your visit to Kenya in 2009, it was a leading and extraordinary moment in my priestly but also personal life. You embraced me, you blessed me and, looking into my eyes, you invited me to Alexandria, with the blessing of my Archbishop, to see at close hand how you minister and to get to know the daily life of our ancient Patriarchate. The Merciful God not only made it possible for me to see the life of a clergyman of our Patriarchate, but through His great grace, I have the greatest blessing of receiving the grace of the hierarchy from your holy hands.

If we had to stand before the Righteous Judge, no one would be worthy. Only the grace of God, which ever heals what is weak and completes what is lacking, transcends and makes man worthy to hear the sweet voice of the incarnate Word and to respond to His highest calling. So I am very aware of my weaknesses and humbly request of Your venerable Beatitude, that you continue to pray for me, the least in the vineyard of the Lord, for my new duty which was given to me by our One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church.

My coming to the holy clergy began with my entrance into the Orthodox Patriarchal Academy in Nairobi. A youngster, whose origins were from a simple village, very early on met with the majesty and the beauty of our Holy Orthodoxy. This meeting, Your Beatitude Father and Master, lit a flame deep within me because it was the first week of my studies at the Patriarchal Academy. I respectfully went to my Archbishop and told him that I wanted to dedicated myself totally to the Church. His Eminence began to smile seeing how young and innocent I was, but he blessed me and told me to pray and to be obedient to the omniscient will of God.

I am nothing important. I am simply a vessel of our Lord and for this reason your trust and the trust of the Holy Synod of this great Church of the Apostle Mark, in me fills me with emotion and humility. As the carpenter forms a piece of wood into a wonderful piece of work, so I pray and hope that the merciful God will have compassion on my unworthiness and will transform me into a useful worker in His vineyard. As our sweet Christ called the fishermen and made them worthy of to pass on the heavenly mysteries, I also pray that our good Lord will support the potential of my unworthiness and will perfect it so that it will become worthy in this high office. I humbly accept this great mission to which our Church has appointed me. This acceptance means complete and blind obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ. The God man who is without beginning is the standard of our life which whispers ceaselessly how we should progress. "Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction and those who enter by it are many" (Matthew 7:13). The second person of the Holy and consubstantial

and Undivided Trinity gives us the strength to overcome difficulties and temptations.

Your Beatitude Father and Master

I am well aware of the problem of the shortage of priests in Africa, particularly in Kenya, where with God's grace I will serve as Auxiliary Bishop beside His Eminence Makarios Metropolitan of Kenya. Glory be to God, the Church of Kenya has witnessed enormous development. Through your prayers Your Beatitude, our tireless Shepherd, His Eminence Makarios Metropolitan of Kenya, unceasingly tries to preach the Holy Gospel of Christ, despite the spiritual, financial and social challenges. Under the leadership of our Metropolitan, and with your prayers, I have the hope that we will be able to elevate the level of ministry in the Archdiocese of Kenya. Your Beatitude, allow me to remind you that the Holy Archdiocese of Kenya has over two hundred and fifty priests, three hundred and forty five parishes and the flock numbers around five hundred thousand. Your Beatitude, this is proof of the enormous spiritual work being done in Kenya. With the grace of God and the leadership of His Eminence our Shepherd, we have done much but we are not finished yet. The Kenyans hunger and thirst for Christ and the Gospel. Our duty is heavy but whatever we do, we do it to the glory of the Holy Triune God. St John reminds us that "I am the good shepherd, I know my own and my own know me" (John 10:14). In this regard, with extreme humility, I would like to say as within a short time I will be undertaking my new duties, my mind turns to the first Kenyan Orthodox Hierarch, His Grace the late Bishop George Gathuna. Being fully aware of the responsibilities and the demands before me, please be assured Your Beatitude that I will dedicate my entire life to "preach the Gospel to the whole creation" (Mark 16:15) and I will preserve the teachings of our Holy Church. I know that as a Bishop of the Church I have to lead with authority. A Bishop has to be spiritual and sacrificial, to be like Him "who gave Himself as a ransom for all" (1 Timothy 2:6).

Your Beatitude Father and Master

It would be inconceivable to conclude my address without thanking you for the trust you have shown me. I thank the members of the Holy Synod of the ancient Patriarchate of Alexandria and All Africa who were enlightened by the Most Holy and Life Giving Spirit and honoured me with their vote. I also wish to thank His Eminence Makarios Metropolitan of Kenya, whom I serve and with whom I matured spiritually under his omophorion. Thanks also to His Eminence Metropolitan Seraphim of Zimbabwe from whom I received the second degree of the priesthood and who then gave me the necessary funding to study overseas. Thanks also to the Orthodox Christian Mission Center who offered me a scholarship to study overseas. Great thanks to the Reverend Protospresbyter Fr Nicholas Triantafyllou, Chairman of the Theological Academy of Holy Cross in Boston. I thank him warmly for his support, love, and concern which he showed me during my student days in Boston. Your Beatitude allow me to thank my beloved mother Priscilla. My mother raised me within the embrace of our Holy Church and guided my steps to the embrace of the Crucified and Resurrected Christ. I am more than sure that my late father Solomon and my late sister Christina would be just as happy. May their memory be eternal. I would also like to thank my spiritual father, Fr Markos, who from time to time reminded me that "one thing I know is that I know nothing". Father Markos, I pray that even after my ordination you will continue to remind me that I know nothing, because this teaching helped me very much.

In conclusion I wish to thank the holy clergy and the faithful flock of our Holy Archdiocese of Kenya, for their prayers and wishes. Special thanks to the flock of

the small missionary Holy Church of St Nektarios and St Irene in Nairobi, which was recently established under my guidance.

I pray that the Arch Shepherd Christ will guide my steps in all good works.

Finally, Your Beatitude, please allow me to quote from the pastoral epistle of St Peter. I pray that this reference will be useful as a reminder of my pastoral duty, "Tend the flock of God that is your charge, not by constraint but willingly, not for shameful gain but eagerly, not as domineering over those in your charge but being examples to the flock" (1 Peter 5: 2-3).

And so, with all this in mind, I pray, "O Lord and Master of my life, take from me the spirit of sloth, despair, lust of power, and idle talk. But give rather the spirit of chastity, humility, patience, and love to Thy servant. Yea, O Lord and King, grant me to see my own transgressions, and not to judge my brother, for blessed art Thou, unto ages of ages. Amen".

Behold I approach Christ our immortal king and God. Behold the servant of the Lord; be it unto me according to Your word. Amen.