

ORDINATION OF HIS GRACE PANTELEIMON BISHOP OF BRAZZAVILLE AND GABON

On Sunday 2nd December 2012, His Beatitude Theodoros II, Pope and Patriarch of Alexandria and All Africa conducted the ordination of His Grace Panteleimon, Bishop of Brazzaville and Gabon, in the beautiful Holy Cathedral of the Annunciation of the Theotokos in Alexandria.

Participating in the Eucharistic Gathering and the Ordination of His Grace were Their Eminences Metropolitan Alexandros of Nigeria, Metropolitan Dorotheos of Syros, Metropolitan Gabriel of Leontopolis, Patriarchal Vicar of Alexandria and Metropolitan Savvas of Accra, together with Their Grace Bishop Nikodimos of Bitria, Patriarchal Vicar of Cairo, and Bishop Niphon of Babylonia Hegumen of the Holy Monastery of St George in Old Cairo.

Also present were The Honourable Consuls General of Greece and of Russia in Alexandria, Messrs Christos Kapodistriasis and Sergey Petlyakov, the Honourable Chairman of the Hellenic Community of Alexandria Mr. Ioannis Siokas, Chairmen of Hellenic Associations and Societies of the Great City, the Principals and Staff of the Hellenic Schools, the students of the "St Athanasios" Patriarchal Academy, family and friends of the ordained Bishop, the entire Hellenic community and visitors from Greece.

During his emotional homily, His Beatitude said the following:

"Your Grace the Elected Bishop of Brazzaville and Congo, my dear spiritual son Panteleimon,

The Son of God was "manifested in the flesh, vindicated in the Spirit, seen by angels, preached among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory" (1 Timothy 3:16). The Mystery of the Incarnation of the Son and Word of God which is beyond understanding for the renewal of mankind, becomes a ceaseless historical presence through the Church. The Church, as a practical community of faith, worship and love, extends to historic perpetuity the salvific work of the sanctification of the world.

A Bishop undertakes the divine duty of making conscious and abiding the fact that the Church, as "the Body of Christ, the fullness of him who fills all in all" (Ephesians 1:22-23), is eternal life. A Bishop, as the bearer, expresser and protector of Apostolic Tradition and Trust, accepts the divine responsibility to consolidate the link of the faithful with Christ and to strengthen the certainty that Christ is a way of existence and of life.

Today, through the grace of the Most Holy Spirit, the Ancient Apostolic Church of Alexandria calls on you to shoulder the enormous responsibility of the pastoral care, in a way that is pleasing to God, of the Holy Diocese of Brazzaville and Gabon "of all men who have a desire to come to the knowledge of truth" (Irenaios, Eloghos, 1, 10, 2). Today the oldest active bearer of the Gospel word in Africa calls on you to serve the divine responsibility of the formation of the existing soul of our African brothers and sisters into a dwelling place of God.

My dear son Panteleimon,

For seven whole years wherever I placed you and appointed you, you have worked honestly and quietly. You gave of yourself with faith and distinction. With dedication and obedience to my paternal exhortations and suggestions. You submitted your soul and love with a knowledge of the timeless historical imperatives and the categorical imperative of dynamic contemporariness of the Most Holy Apostolic

Throne of Saint Mark.

You uncomplainingly stood by my side and with exemplary patience and wisdom, you bore the burden of the staff positions of my Private Office and then of the Chief Secretariat of the Holy Synod. You assisted me in my efforts as head of Orthodoxy in Africa, so that I could promote the witness of our Patriarchate to all the ends of the continent of the future.

In international meetings and conferences you were tried and proved that you are endowed with knowledge and skills on a high level. With my blessings you brought to the fore our loving contact with our fellow human beings and the unprejudiced acceptance and support of the carriers and those suffering from AIDS.

But also here in Alexander's Great City with your selfless approachability and the inexhaustible kindness of your soul, you served as Dean of the Holy Cathedral of the Annunciation of the Theotokos with the unmistakable indicator of your pastoral path the truth so eloquently expressed by Nilos the Ascetic: "to sin in human; to despair is satanic and ruinous".

These virtues that you have were timeously observed and providentially fostered by a distinguished Hierarch who adorns the Church of Greece with his presence and activities: your teacher, benefactor and rightly proud in the Lord of your progress, His Eminence Dorotheos II, Metropolitan of Syros and Tinos who is present here today and concelebrated with us. Your Eminence, we thank you for your presence here and your prayers, we owe you heartfelt gratitude, because you educated and showed forth a man of distinguished Church stature.

After my proposal, these virtues were also noted by my Holy Synod, who rewarded you for your ethos and contribution, electing you unanimously as first Bishop of the newly established Diocese of Brazzaville and Congo with the criterion of manning the spiritual ship of Christ, who was humbled as a man "to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad" (John 11:51-52).

Your Grace, the elected Bishop of Brazzaville and Gabon,

You are undeniably worthy of working and being proven to be a good Bishop and Hierarch, working towards the cultivation of the spiritual field which the Apostolic and Patriarchal Throne of St Mark has entrusted to you. You are admittedly able to become worthy of the expectations of your Father and Patriarch, who expects a great deal from you.

However do not forget that the venture of catechism is painstaking, the work of administration concerns is laborious, liturgical responsibilities are high, Holy and Divine is the Gospel mission, which Christ gives you through my Humility. Never forget that Hierarchal service is a continuous and sacrificial witness of love.

You must give water to the thirsty, and food to the needful, console the sad and protect the orphans, assist the sick and the prisoner. In other words, you have to give of yourself wherever the needs of your flock call you, as "the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep" (John 10:11).

In this good work you will always have your Patriarch beside you, who will care for you and will follow your progress. With petitionary prayers he will pray that you will become an imitator of Christ in the spreading of the Gospel message of love. With paternal understanding he will listen to your problems and your struggles. With affection he will remind you of what Victor Hugo so wisely said: "as far away as the mind can get, it can never reach the heart".

In your good work you will be accompanied by the prayers of beloved people: those

of your mother, your father, your sister, your cherished niece, the friends you have in your heart who call you blessed because of the value placed on you by the Church.

My son Panteleimon,

At this moment of meditation I prayerfully call on the mediation of the Blessed Virgin of the island Tinos where you were born, to protect every step of your life and of your heirarchal journey, as well as the mediation of your patron, the Saint and Miracle Worker the Unmercenary Panteleimon the Healer.

Rejoice and be glad Panteleimon! The blessed hour has come! Approach the Bridal Chamber of the Lord to rise to the third and final step of the Priesthood! Approach so that you can receive Prelacy from my human yet acclaimed through divine Grace Patriarchal hands. May God be your helper and protector! Amen!"

His Grace Panteleimon said:

"Your Beatitude Father and Master,

If, according to Aristotle, "man differs from other animals in this, that he loves honour", then the wish and the pursuit of an honour and some office is a frequent, if not completely human weakness".

There are however, honours and offices which slip away from human parameters, surpass human boundaries, conquer the earthly and approach the heavenly. These are the honours for which the Word of God is clear: "One does not take the honour upon himself, but he is called by God just as Aaron was" (Hebrews 5:4).

It is the highest honour of the Hierarchy, which "depends not man's will or exertion, but on God's mercy" (Roman's 9:16) and through which "every gift and light emitted within us" as St Symeon Archbishop of Thessaloniki, the Mystic says, adding that: "without this there can be no altar, nor ordination, nor holy chrism, nor baptism; therefore not even a Christian; though it true Christianity and everything about Christ remain always as sacraments".

For this reason, a Hierarchy, according to St Nikodimos the Agiorite, is "the source of all graces.....a spirit-filled image of God.....and a most clear mirror of Godly majesty, receptive of the brilliance of the Light".

The fiery tongues of Pentecost, to the holy light of the Resurrectional candle, are transmitted through a centuries old spiritual torch relay, from the Holy Apostles to the Hierarchs and through them to the Church militant, whose Altar is lit and brightened and brightens, is illumined and illumines, to the end of history, and renders mankind from earthly and perishable to fiery, immortal and heavenly beings.

Your Beatitude,

Both your title, the most illustrious title of an Orthodox Primate, as well as the title of the Ancient Second Throne Patriarchate of Orthodoxy, incorporate the element "All Africa". On this vast continent, tortured by the human malevolence of the so-called "developed world", this continent of the future, as you have so accurately defined it, those pioneers of the Gospel who make daily sacrifices, convert into practice the petition of the Lord's Prayer: "Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven".

With the firm certainty of the ecclesiastical Body, that the Kingdom of God is already a reality and His will an undeniable fact, missionaries contribute to the coming of the Eternal Kingdom in historic time, preaching "on earth", particularly in Africa, and making a heaven of the present world.

It is this divine mission that is given to me today, and I am made a responsible shareholder, accountable to the Creator and Arch Shepherd Lord of the Church, and am called on by our Holy Church to bear on my weak shoulders the enormous responsibility of bringing heaven to the noble and accepting people of the two countries of Congo-Brazzaville and Gabon, as the first Bishop of this ecclesial Province of the Most Venerable Throne of St Mark, thereby strengthening my humble service for the flock of Christ in West Africa with extreme sacrifice.

I know well that I am not worthy of today's invaluable honour. I shake at the thought that I am undertaking the responsibility of incarnating the Orthodox teaching to the flock entrusted to me and to continue, as a spiritual relay racer, the two thousand year Apostolic and Patristic tradition.

I hope, though, that the Lord, through His ineffable love will grant me everything needed for the benefit and illumination of the "least of these my brothers". I beseech Him only to fill the manger of my humble soul with total love and humility, the only consistent requirements which lead to Knowledge, Wisdom and Prudence.

Your Beatitude Pope and Patriarch of Alexandria, Most Divine Father and Benefactor,

The infinite mercy of God has granted me the precious gift to serve and to study, under Your Patriarchal Omoforion, at the great spiritual school of our Patriarchate. It was His wish, to strengthen my faith, to study at the Patriarchal Chapel, whose floor is marked from your bended knees and is dampened from the tears of your struggle and concern for your flock daily, as you know well.

It was His wish that I study at the feet of the Teacher of patience, forbearance, prayer, especially though of love, that paternal love which knows even how to retract to give time and space to the one who is wrong, to think and to return, so that leaving the Patriarchal Court today, I can feel the joy and responsibility of sharing in your personal virtue.

I bless you and am thankful for the trust and the paternal care with which you have surrounded me and all in general that you most generously you gave me secretly and openly, declaring before the Church my eternal dedication to You and the Patriarchal Throne.

It was the will of God that I, by Venerable Patriarchal agreement and generosity, serve the Holy Synod from the position of Chief Secretary, in order that I would learn from the labours and the efforts of the Holy Hierarchs, so that I could become a shareholder of their missionary and administrative experiences, as well as of their daily beneficial love, which came to a head recently through their honourable vote, and for this I thank them respectfully, especially those Synodal Metropolitans who are here today concelebrating, Their Eminences Alexandros of Nigeria, Gabriel of Leontopolis, and Savvas of Accra, whom I also thank for their willing attendance in Alexandria; I also thank His Grace Nikodimos Bishop of Nitria Patriarchal Vicar in the Egyptian capital and His Grace Niphon Hegumen of the Holy Monastery of St George Old Cairo.

It was also the will of God that in the first steps of my priestly journey I study next to you, Most Venerable Primate Metropolitan Dorotheos of Syros, Tinos and of the other blessed islands. I am grateful to you because in you I came to know unpretentious love, rhetorical flair, the unlimited contribution to teaching and the opportunity to learn ecclesiastical administration issues.

But it was also God's will that I be born of such parents! A father, a hard worker and an honest man, who taught me by his example to work with dedication, passion and honesty. And a mother, viably faithful, a lady of kindness, sacrifice, and respect, who indelibly etched within my soul the path of my spiritual life.

From the bottom of my heart I thank my good brothers of the Patriarchal Court, and firstly my spiritual father His Eminence Metropolitan Gabriel of Leontopolis, Patriarchal Vicar of Alexandria, in whose daily company I was enriched with rare experience.

I praise the Triune God firstly for all of them and for all them I will always pray, as well as for the family of my sister in the flesh and my close friends, both priests and lay people, who are with us today.

Thought though, as a seagoing bird, flies from the God-walked land of the Nile over the Mediterranean and for a while rests on the beloved island of my birth, the holy island of Tinos, and hears the sweet sounds that I heard as a child, the bellfry of the Megaloharis, before whose miraculous icon I bend my knee; I visit my friends and family and then goes on to Siros and to the Administrative Centre of the Holy Metropolis where it thanks my precious colleagues there for everything that we endured together during my six-year administrative and preaching service with them, and the wonderful people of Siros who embraced me with love and still continues to do so!

Re baptized it returns to this beautiful church which I served humbly for six years, bearing with it the memory of the late Elder Metropolitan Dorotheos Steka of Siros through whose hands I received the two ranks of the Priesthood and whose virtuous love and biblical person I feel is here today and is praying with us.

Your Beatitude, Your Eminences, beloved Fathers and dear brothers and sisters,

I know the Lord's admonition that: "by your words you will be justified and by your words you will be condemned" (Matthew 12:37).

However, with your wishes and prayers, your love and support, I will work and I will live up to your expectations, worthy to show myself able for the requirements of my flock and to be tried at the Heavenly Judgment Seat on that last day.

" my soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour.....for all that He has done for me". So be it!

Immediately thereafter in the Throne Room, His Beatitude awarded His Eminence Dorotheos Metropolitan of Siros the medal of the Commander of the Order of the Lion of Alexandria, as well as a Hierarchal Pectoral Cross and a staff, emphasizing in loving words the many years of friendship which binds them and the many ways in which the Metropolis of Syros has contributed to the Ancient Patriarchate of Alexandria, mentioning also the great contribution of the Church of Greece to the Missionary efforts in Africa.

In his reply, Metropolitan Dorotheos said: Your ceaseless concern for the Patriarchate and Orthodox Missions in Africa, not caring about labour and travail, is for the Church and for all of us who love you a sense of pride and the cause for more prayers.

We thank you Your Beatitude for this blessing today of serving with you and for our participation in the ordination as Bishop of the Bishop of Brazzaville and Gabon, His Grace Panteleimon, a son of the Blessed island of Tinos which is protected by the Virgin Mary, who was ordained twelve years ago by the late Elder reposing among the Saints, my predecessor Dorotheos I.

His Grace Panteleimon served the Holy Metropolis of Siros for five years, honourably and conscientiously and then, being taken under your Patriarchal Omoforion and your paternal love, he showed you his many graces.....Your Beatitude, it is not only those spiritually present who are looking down on your beloved presence

at this moment, your predecessor Patriarchs who came from the Metropolis of Siros, the late Fotios of Tinos, Matthew of Andros and Ierotheos II of Sifnos, but today, Metropolitan Alexandros of Nigeria who comes from Ermopolis in Siros, and the newly placed Bishop of Brazzaville and Gabon, Panteleimon of Tinos, are also members of the Hierarchs of the Throne.

Your Beatitude, we are departing for Ermopolis the seat of our Metropolis in Siros, with our entourage, filled with emotions of honour and gratitude to you. Many years Father and Master!"

Then the Honourable Mr Ioannis Siokas, Chairman of the Hellenic Community of Alexandria, hosted an official lunch at the Hellenic Naval Club in Alexandria, to celebrate this notable day.

From the Patriarchate