

ORDINATION OF HIS GRACE VASILEIOS BISHOP OF BOTSWANA

On Sunday 30 November 2014, His Beatitude Theodoros II, Pope and Patriarch of Alexandria and All Africa conducted the ordination of His Grace Vasileios Bishop of Botswana at the Holy Patriarchal Cathedral of St Savvas the Sanctified. Participating in the Eucharistic Gathering and the ordination of His Grace were Their Eminences Metropolitans George of Guinea, Dimitrios of Irinopolis, Gabriel of Leontopolis and Narkissos of Nubia.

Present were the Honourable Consul General of Greece in Alexandria Mr. Christos Kapodistriias, Chairmen of Hellenic Societies and Associations of the Great City, the Nuns that live at the Dependency of the Patriarchate of Alexandria in Athens, as well as family members and friends of the ordained Bishop.

During his address, His Beatitude emotionally said the following:

“Wherefore it is fitting that you should run together in accordance with the will of your bishop, which thing also you do. For your justly renowned presbytery, worthy of God, is fitted as exactly to the bishop as the strings are to the harp. Therefore in your concord and harmonious love, Jesus Christ is sung”.

(St Ignatios the God-bearer, to the Ephesians §4)

Your Grace elected Bishop of Botswana and our dear brother in the Lord, Vasileios,

Just before His voluntary and terrible and life-creating passion, our Lord Jesus Christ in his anguished prayer to God the Father, when perspiration was running like drops of blood (Luke 22:44), He centred on the request for unity in those emotional words: “I ask...that they may all be one, even as You Father are in me and I in You, that they may also be in us” (John 17:21). In the same way St Ignatios the God-bearer, while being led on foot, in chains from Antioch to Rome to become food for the lions, would write as he went, addressing the churches of Ephesus, Smyrna and Philadelphia, pleading and praying as a genuine model of Jesus, for one thing, unity.

And he so praised and glorified and insisted on this issue, that he came to say:

“It is profitable, therefore, that you should live in a blameless unity, that so you may always enjoy communion with God” (To the Ephesians § 4).

In other words, a precondition for participation and communion with God, is ensuring unity.

And further along, this most gentle of Saints continues, saying that: “he who does not assemble with the Church, has manifested his pride and to avoid pride we must subject ourselves to the Bishop” (To the Ephesians § 5). Therefore, a visible sign of unity in the Church, is the Bishop, but he also builds the mystery of unity, not alone, but together with the priests, the deacons and the faithful, without whom, “a Church is not called”, according to the well-known expression by St Ignatios.

My dear Father Vasileios,

In the 16 long years that by the grace of God you have served the ancient Patriarchate of Alexandria, you have proved your dedication and obedience to the Church of Alexandria and its Primate, in the various executive positions wherever and whenever the providence of God appointed you Both in Johannesburg and in Cairo, where you served as Parish Priest, as well as at the dependency of our Patriarchate, the Holy Church of Ss Athanasios, Nicholas and Fotios, in Ano Kypseli, where you devoted yourself to serving as Parish Priest and spiritual

father, you showed in practice your love for and faith in God, as well as man, His image, without distinction of nationality, language or colour. Also as Secretary of the Representative Office of the Primate of our ancient Patriarchate, you showed the responsibility of your character. But what particularly moved us, both me personally as well as the holy hierarchs who honoured you with their vote, is the virtue of the gratitude which you showed to your late elder, Metropolitan Chrysostomos of Carthage, whom you never abandoned, but served with genuine filial dedication.

And see, now, the grace of the Merciful God, watching over your loving heart, inspired the holy Synod of the Alexandrian Church following the proposal of its Primate to elect you as Bishop of Botswana, appointing you "as a light on a stand", (Luke 11, 33) so that with the radiance of your virtuous deeds, you may become a point of attraction for human beings who hunger and thirst for the knowledge and justice of God, as well as a visible point of reference of the unity of the body of the Lord, the Church.

Be assured that my paternal love will always be with you, next to you, together with the love and prayers of the Hierarchs who voted for you, in every step of your hierarchal journey. Give to the people of the Diocese of Botswana to which you were elected, your sacrificial self, working towards your personal salvation, as well as the salvation of your flock; in this world that is becoming ever more inhumane, become a preacher of the value of human beings. As Christian humanists we have a duty to progress always further than the superficial, where human existences are formed into groups, so that we might discover the genuine human face, which is never predictable. In the discovery of the differences we need to rejoice in the surprise of the ability of finding a meeting point with another, who is different, on many levels, because in the spiritual world there is no monotony and boredom. And unity in Christ does not fear difference, but rather gives it meaning and enriches it. This inspiration is what contemporary man needs, and this is the best mission.

In Africa, the continent of the future, where the grace of the great God deemed us worthy to serve, a "vision" is needed, as well as faith. We often tread there where there is no road, because you make the way open as you walk. But I beg you my child, Father Vasileios, do not hesitate! As you look around on the path, you will see invisibly, following the Lord, just as the Disciples who walked to Emmaus. So now, that God gives you the grace of Hierarchy, today on your personal Pentecost, be sure that He will always be with you, strengthening and supporting you, in every request of your loving heart, because our God is a God of love; "I am a God near at hand, says the Lord and not a God far off", according to the Prophet Jeremiah (Chapter 23).

Have courage, therefore, Your Grace and holy brother, because we serve the humble God of love, the God who from the eruption of His heart, left the blessing of His divinity and became man just like us, to lead us to His divine blessedness. This God awaits you now, in the Holy of Holies, to grant you the grace of Hierarchy. So, enter into the grace of your Lord, my child, Vasileios!

His Grace Vasileios replied:

Your Beatitude Father and Master,
Honoured Clergy,
Deacons in Christ,
Dear present friends,

I send up Glory to the Triune God who deemed my unworthiness worthy to find myself

today before the dread altar to receive from the honoured hands of Your Beatitude, the third and greatest rank of Hierarchy.

If it were possible, Your Beatitude, I would seal my mouth and in total silence, I would experience the sacrament of my personal Pentecost. But it is not me who will stop the practice of the one being ordained making an address before his ordination.

I am not going to try to analyze the meaning of today. Many and more learned theologians, before me, have done so with excellent results. The only point I wish to make and which I wish to stand as a signpost in my hierarchal life and journey, is what was said by the Lord: "I did not come to be served but to serve".

At this most holy moment my entire life and my journey in the Church, passes before my eyes. I do not wish to tire you with lengthy reports of it, I pray only that on judgment day, that I can announce "Father, those you entrusted to me, I have not lost even one of them".

At this time I wish to thank my spiritual fathers who are in heaven, those who lifted the burden of my soul, on days of sadness and doubts, father Angelos Tolia and the late Kallinikos Metropolitan of Pilousion.

The late Metropolitan Chrysostomos of Carthage at whose feet I learned and became a man spiritually and who was the reason that I became part of the clergy of the Most Venerable Patriarchal Throne of Alexandria and All Africa. I remained with him, until the tragic end of his life and it is he who taught me not to seek praises in my life, but to prepare myself to cope with the hardships of life.

I am still looking for the words with which to thank His Eminence George Metropolitan of Guinea. I deem that God, in His immeasurable mercy, sent to me a dear brother, with every meaning of the word, in all things and for ever. He has a diamond character, kind in all ways and a strong supporter of the rights of the Throne. Your Eminence, I pray wholeheartedly that everything you did manifestly and invisibly for me, the Lord will grant you a hundredfold and that you will see the health of your beloved mother Andriane, fully restored.

I also wish to thank my beloved mother Kalliope who stood as sleepless guard beside me, always serving with a smile, but embittered by life which gave her nothing. She brought up me and my two siblings, Stella and Strato, with great effort and fatigue and today she is worthily gladdened seeing the Benjamin of her family rising up to the rank of Hierarch.

My brother and sister who all these years have silently supported me, my nephews and nieces who dearly love me and who, because of the financial crisis could not be with us today. All these together, I thank from the depths of my heart and I will always pray at the Altar for their health and their progress in Christ.

Mr brothers in Kypseli who took me on as almost a child and brought me up in the Holy Church of St Athanasios, our Dependency in Kypseli; I do not forget them. I am grateful to them for making me try to become better than I was and many times to overcome myself to serve them.

In conclusion, allow me to speak of you, Your Beatitude Father and Master. We have known each other since the time when I, as a young deacon still, kissed your hand as the Bishop of Cyrene. Your smiling character and the love of Elder Chrysostomos for you, made me love you even more. I still treasure the letter you sent me, as Metropolitan of Cameroon, relating your journey, your work and your love for missions. Standing before you today, I as elected Bishop of Botswana and you as Primate of the Church of Alexandria, knowing your fervent desire for the establishment and consolidation of the Orthodox Church in the hospitable country of Botswana, I promise that I will do everything possible and impossible, so that the lamp that you as the essential Missionary lit, in this corner of Africa. Many years Your Beatitude, may you live in peace and may my grateful heart always see in your person the Angel of forgiveness, the source of unceasing love, the pillar of the Alexandrian Church and the pure and loving father of Orthodox Missions.

