

THE ORDINATION OF HIS GRACE AGATHONIKOS BISHOP OF ARUSHA AND CENTRAL TANZANIA

On 11th December 2016, the Sunday of the Forefathers, **His Beatitude Theodoros II, Pope and Patriarch of Alexandria and All Africa** conducted the Patriarchal Divine Liturgy and during the service he performed the ordination of His Grace Agathonikos, Bishop of Arusha and Central Tanzania, at the Holy Patriarchal Church of St. Savvas the Sanctified in Alexandria.

Participating in the Eucharistic Gathering and the ordination of His Grace were Their Eminences Metropolitans Apostolos of Militus, George of Kitrous and Katerini, Ioustinos of Nea Krini and Kalamaria, Dimitrios of Irinopolis, Niphon of Pilousion, Narkissos of Accra the Patriarchal Vicar of Alexandria and Meletios of Carthage. Also present were the Honorable Consul General of Greece in Alexandria Mr. Emmanuel Kakavelakis, the Honorable Chairman of the Hellenic Community of Alexandria Mr. Ioannis Papadopoulos, the Honorable Chairman of the Arabic speaking Community of Alexandria Mr. Fouad and other Chairmen of Societies and Associations of Hellenic Society. The Church was filled with faithful not only from Alexandria, but also by many pilgrims from various parts of Greece who traveled to be present at the ordination.

In his emotional address, His Beatitude said:

“The Didache of the Twelve Apostles exhorts: “Elect, therefore, for yourselves bishops and deacons worthy of the Lord, men who are meek and not covetous, and true and approved, for they perform for you the service of prophets and teachers” (Didache 15:1). It is the ordination of such a new bishop that we celebrate today, the elected Bishop Agathonikos of the newly-established Diocese of Arusha and Central Tanzania, thereby rewarding the efforts and his diverse ministry to the Church of the Saint and Evangelist Mark.

My child Agathonikos,

You were deemed worthy by God to be honoured with the highest office of hierarchy, an office about which St Ignatios the God-bearer says: “The priests indeed are good, but the High Priest is better; to whom the holy of holies has been committed, and who alone has been trusted with the secrets of God. He is the door of the Father, by which enter in Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and the prophets, and the apostles, and the Church. All these have for their object the attaining to the unity of God” (To the Philadelphians 9:1).

Your elevation to the rank of Bishop is not accidental. Key participants in this are your brilliant character and your morals, your methodical hard work, your excellent Theological constitution, and your deep Ecclesiastical consciousness. You stood beside Your Patriarch and carried the burden of the Private Patriarchal Office and the Chief Secretariat of the Holy Synod. You are a gifted and able member of the clergy, exceptionally trained, but above all you have a fervour and love for the Church of St Mark and its efforts with the African people. You were a pioneer missionary in Tanzania and for this reason our Holy Synod elected you as Bishop of the region of Arusha in that country. Do not flinch when faced by the new directive given to you by the Church of Alexandria. “Depart for I will send you far away to the Gentiles”, says the Lord (Acts 22:21). “Be strong and of good courage, do not fear or be in dread of them, for it is the Lord your God who goes with you, he will not fail you or forsake you” (Deuteronomy 31:6).

Serve God’s people, “become an example for believers” (1 Timothy 4:12), “a light to lighten the Gentiles” (Luke 2:32) and as St Gregory the Theologian says, become

"the lamp of the Church" (Epistle 41:5). The people of Africa want light, so become the light "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven"(Matthew 5:16). Disseminate your light, the light of the Church in the missions through your sacrificial theology of contribution and hardship, but above all with love "so that they might prepare God's people to serve. Then the body of Christ will be built up" (Ephesians 4:12). Minister to the suffering African people having before you that Christ did not come to earth "for tyranny and fear and consternation...but for grace and gentleness...without force because force is not appropriate with God...he does not persecute and he does not judge" (To Diogenes, 7). And as John Chrysostomos adds: "the Bishop must be all things, to bear all the weight of others; because for those who are enraged, it is forgiveness" (Oration on Acts 60:39).

That is why, my child Agathonikos, follow the advisory words of the Didache of the Twelve Apostles "Do not hesitate to give, to not grumble when giving; for you will know who is the good paymaster of your reward. Do not turn away from him that is in want, but make your brother partaker in all things, and do not say that anything is your own. Never forsake the commandments of the Lord; but keep those things which you have received, neither adding to them nor taking away from them. (Didache 4:1-17). Preach in the depths of Africa, as St Paul Says: "Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction" (2 Timothy 4:2), preach Christ and Him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:2). "Do not give sleep to your eyes, or slumber to your eyelids or rest to you temples: until you find out a place for the Lord, a tabernacle for the God of Jacob (Psalm 131:4-5)

Disseminate the values and the truths of the Orthodox faith and the loving Orthodox way of life, throughout Africa, the people and the cultures. Project the divine-human person of the Risen Christ, who elevated human nature and revealed its sacredness as a bearer of the image of Christ. Become the balm of love and sweeten the pain of human hearts. Give your love to the suffering African people; just one look and a compassionate word from you are enough to wipe away the tears of their pain. "Love will show the true shepherd; for love the great Shepherd was crucified", says St John Chrysostomos (John Chrysostomos, Oration on the Priesthood, II).

Give priority to the defence of the rights of the weak, so that their honest labours are not constantly misappropriated by those skilful in injustices. Protect the people of Africa, especially the children, who are the hope of our Church and the hope of Africa. Choose as your colleagues those who fear God so that His word may be magnified.

Do not be disappointed and do not be afraid; arm yourself with strength and patience, walk on the wild waves as Peter did, looking at Christ's face. You have Him as your helper and guide. Him who became "the price for setting many free" (Matthew 20:28). He will hold you so that you can safely tread on the slippery paths of your hierarchal ministry. In every difficulty you must always proclaim the words of St John Chrysostomos "Glory to God in everything" and your heart will be cleared of the burdens of your hierarchal ministry and the smile of Christian joy will not leave your lips.

My dear child Agathonikos,

spread your honest hands, and "receive the favour with fear, lend to him who gave, distribute to the poor and acquire the Lord as your friend, that you may stand at His right hand when He comes in glory, and you may hear His blessed voice: Enter my servant into the joy of your Lord" (Doxastikon of the Aposticha of Great and Holy

Tuesday and Matthew 25:23).

After the dismissal of the Divine Liturgy a festive meal was hosted for all present. His Beatitude then received the guest Hierarchs from Greece and the group of pilgrims at the Patriarchal Mansion, where they had the opportunity of a conducted tour of the museums of the Patriarchate, and he gave them all commemorative gifts and blessings.

Curriculum Vitae of His Grace Agathonikos Bishop of Arusha and Central Tanzania

His Grace **Agathonikos** (Nikolaidis) **the Bishop of Arusha and Central Tanzania** was born in Giannitsa in 1964. He holds a Degree from the Educational Academy in Florina and from the Theological Faculty of the Aristotelian University of Thessaloniki. He has been a monk of the Holy Monastery of St. Dionysios of Olympos since 1986. He served as Preacher in the Metropolises of Florina and Kitrous, and from 2004 to 2011 he served in various Missionary parts of Africa, following a blessing by His Beatitude Theodoros II, Pope and Patriarch of Alexandria and All Africa, then as Chancellor of the Holy Metropolis of Tanzania.

In December 2013 following an invitation from His Beatitude, he went to Alexandria where he served as Dean of the Saint Athanasios Patriarchal Academy, as Codicographer and Director of the Private Office of His Beatitude.

On 17th December 2016 by proposal of His Beatitude the Patriarch, he was unanimously elected as Bishop of the newly-established Diocese of Arusha and Central Tanzania, and was ordained by His Beatitude on 11th December 2016 at the Holy Patriarchal Church of St Savvas in Alexandria.