

ORDINATION OF HIS GRACE MELETIOS BISHOP OF NAFKRATIS BY HIS BEATITUDE

On Friday 5th November 2014, His Beatitude Theodoros II, Pope and Patriarch of Alexandria and All Africa conducted the ordination of His Grace Meletios Bishop of Nafkratis at the Holy Patriarchal Cathedral of St Savvas the Sanctified. Participating in the Eucharistic Gathering and the ordination of His Grace, were Their Eminences Paul of Glyfada, Gabriel of Leontopolis Patriarchal Vicar of Alexandria, Gennadios of Nilopolis, Niphon of Pilousion Hegumen of the Holy Patriarchal Monastery of St George Old Cairo, and Narkissos of Nubia. Many Clergy and a group of pilgrims from Greece, Chairmen of Societies and Associations of the Great City, as well as the faithful of the Alexandrian Community came to the Monastery which was celebrating its feast day.

In his address His Beatitude emotionally said:

“Today the grace of the Holy Spirit has gathered us together...” (Vespers of Palm Sunday).

Your Grace, elected Bishop Meletios of Nafkratis and beloved brother in the Lord,

In an atmosphere flooded by the presence of the Holy Spirit, due to the double feast we celebrate today, your ordination as Bishop and the memory of St Savvas the Sanctified, “we have gathered for this”, seeing as truly the Most Holy Spirit has called us. For this is the work of the third person of the Holy Trinity: unity, agreement, joy and consolation. That is why it is called the Paraclete, or the Comforter.

Today, therefore, the peaceful breeze of the Most Holy Spirit blows, as it does every time our Holy Church performs the ordination of one of its Bishops. That is why all the troparia of matins and the Divine Liturgy are taken from Pentecost. The Most Holy Spirit, according to the experience of our Holy Church, by its invisible state, “constitutes the whole institution of the Church” (Vespers of Pentecost). And it is exactly this mystical, silent and invisible presence which inspires the ethos and the position of Orthodox spirituality. For, according to the hymn writer, “The Holy Spirit is what unites, what you can possess with peace being its prize”.

The grace of the Most Holy Spirit through the vote of the Hierarchs of the Holy Synod of our Patriarchate, elected you Bishop of the Alexandrian Church a few days ago, dear Father Meletios, and so today at the feast of our Venerable Father Savvas the Sanctified, the wonderworker, the feast of our Monastery, of which you are the Hegumen, you are deemed worthy to ascend the holy ranks of Hierarchy through your ordination as Bishop.

My dear Father Meletios,

You have already given examples of love, patience and obedience in your service, and of your dedication to our Ancient Patriarchate, to the throne of St Mark and to its Primate, serving our Patriarchate lovingly and sacrificially from the sensitive position of Hegumen of the Holy Patriarchal Monastery of St Savvas the Sanctified, as well as in any other ministry to which you have been appointed, throughout the six years with the mercy of God you have lived among us.

With the unique diligence of your charisma, your love in other words, “for the

beauty of the house of the God", you have devoted yourself night and day, caring not only for the well-balanced operation of the services of the Monastery, but also for whatever possible beautification thereof.

You have tirelessly worked so that our pious faithful, were able to experience the unbroken unity of our Church in this bastion in which the grace of God ordered that we should serve, where what is obvious in our blessed homeland is not available to us, but which here are a vision and a dream unfortunately. Of course, we belong to one, catholic and apostolic Church, a truly Christian nation but it is not those who alone have and who use Christian tradition, but those who live it and who contribute.

Particularly in our Patriarchate, which God's grace gave us as a "field", in Africa, the Continent of the future, this duty has taken on gigantic dimensions. We are called on to journey on long, unending roads, bringing the peaceful message of the Gospel of Christ, to nations who are not deserving of the conditions which human harshness has ordered them to live in, and who deserve and should be given the vision and the dream.

My dear child, Meletios,

The honorable vote of the holy Hierarchs has honoured you with your election, as a Bishop of the ancient and once bright Diocese of Nafkratis. Nafkratis was once a settlement of the ancient Miletus during 600 B. C. when they were "rulers of the seas", according to the historian Stephanos of Byzantium, which was a purely Greek city, situated on the east coast of the Canopus tributary of the Nile, and was honoured with a diocesan throne by the Christians of the first centuries, always directly dependent on each Pope and Patriarch of Alexandria.

Therefore in this new ministry, to which you have been appointed by the Holy Church of Christ, place your hopes on the Head of our salvation, Jesus Christ who, when all of us are sea-faring, in our own ships, in the sea of life, He can guide us as an able helmsman to the safe harbours of the completion of divine will, by inspiration of the serene Holy Spirit, which through me your Spiritual father, calls on you to enter the innermost holy sanctuary.

His Grace Meletios said:

Saviour, Behold a humble heart, behold a broken heart, and grant me from above your grace, grant me Your Divine Spirit. Grant me the Comforter, and send down, as You promised, also to me the besieged in the loft, Master, pleading with you and expecting Your Spirit. (Hymn 41 from the Divine Eros of our Father among the Saints Symeon the New Theologian).

Your Beatitude Father and Master,

With these touching words by our Father amongst the Saints Symeon the New Theologian, before the doors of the Holy Altar, with tears in my eyes and being called upon to accept the effective and all-powerful Divine Grace, a flood of emotions fill my earthly being and an ecstasy of emotional tremors shakes my heart.

What can I say at this unique moment when my heart beats with holy emotion and my thoughts whirl from the magnitude of this hoped-for office?

Fear and joy, awe and elation, possess my being. Joy, as I am deemed worthy today to undertake the greatest ministry of the divine Services, and awe, because I am inadequate and deficient for this kind of merit.

In the midst of these conflicting emotions, I praise firstly the mercy and the forbearance of the Great God, because from the first steps of my life up until this sacred moment His Right Hand has guided my existence.

Filled with gratitude my soul sings to my Bridegroom Lord: "Blessed is the Lord God, who dwells on high who raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap, to make him sit with the princes of his people".

This is why I am aghast, thinking about the obligation facing me. What can I render to the Lord for all that He has given me?

The honour is great, the obligation enormous, the responsibility most heavy.

That is why the timidity of my heart is excessive and the thoughts of awe are justifiable.

I am aware of the value of the Hierarchy. Of course, I am not about to describe and present the importance of the Hierarchical office. By Divine approval from my very young years I studied at the feet of "venerable men" such as the late reverend Metropolitan Chrysostomos Themelis of Messinia, who ordained me to the two ranks of the Priesthood, the late distinguished noble and good Metropolitan Stephanos of Trifylia and Olympia, my "compatriot coming from the same monastery as I did" Metropolitan Efstathios of Monemvasia and Sparta, who was defined by his ethos, as well as Metropolitan Gabriel of Leontopolis, he who is filled with wisdom and prudence.

With such examples I formed the image of a Bishop on my conscience. It is this image which I carry in my soul and this is the image I wish for myself too.

Therefore, faced with the enormous responsibilities of a Bishop, I am justifiably daunted, but I drop the anchor of my hope on the Lord, crying out "Lord, help me" so that I can hear the divine voice saying "I will never leave you and I will never abandon you"

With these thoughts and taking courage from the strength from above, I come before you, Your Beatitude Father and Master, and I humbly bow my head, turning my gaze on your revered person, so that I may in debt express my gratitude to you, after God.

Your paternal love, has been poured onto me just as the waters of the Nile, and has benefitted my life, which is my heart is overflowing with gratitude. Beside Your Beatitude, I found a place of refuge when I left my paternal land. As an affectionate father you surrounded me with genuine love, you tolerated me with considerate leniency, you showed my humble self trust, and you honoured me in manifold ways.

For six consecutive years, living "in my Father's house", and having you as my daily companion, I learned and benefitted spiritually, from the ethos of your person, the gentleness of your character, the piety of your soul. I was filled with the example of your philanthropic and merciful charisma, but essentially I was taught by the dynamic of your love.

All these years you have shown me practically that does not rest on the continuation of the apostolic succession, rather he transforms it into a springboard of historic continuation. You taught me that a Bishop is not an academic teacher, but a bearer of conviction and ethos and many times ought to

sacrifice himself too.

And behold, Your Beatitude, "in the Holy Spirit", you watched over me favourably, and remembered my unworthiness, proposed me to the Venerable Hierarchs of the Alexandrian Throne to promote me as Auxiliary Bishop.

Rather, I am able to say, that beside you I will be assisted by you, being taught, receiving your example, inspired, guided also in my further hierarchal ministry.

I pray from my innermost existence, that I will be "useful in service" and a co-Cyrenean in your struggle to viably maintain the presence of Orthodoxy in the land of the Nile. It is not the few people that matter, but the quantity and greatness of the duty, to keep alight the Lighthouse of the apostolic throne of St Mark.

At the same time, I pray that I will be able to assist you, even just a little, in your sacred mission, on the vast African fields, so that you might ease the essentially poor people of Christ, those who hunger and thirst not only for the Word of God, but also for their daily bread.

In a crowded Church and in a gathering of dignitaries and lay people, I embrace your right hand which has shown kindness to me, declaring my eternal obedience and dedication to the Venerable Throne and to Your Beatitude.

To this end with great respect I give an embrace of love and honour to those who together bear the Cross of your Patriarchal tenure, the honourable Hierarchy, thanking each and every one of the Hierarchs for the promotion and their love. Particularly though, the Holy Synodal Hierarchs present here, Gennadios of Neilopolis, Niphon of Pilousion and Narkissos of Nubia.

Especially, allow me to gratefully thank him who guided me at the Patriarchate of Alexandria, my Most Venerable Spiritual Father, Metropolitan Gabriel of Leontopolis. I admit that following the death of my Spitiual Father who ordained me, the late Chrysostomos of Messinia, I found in him the protector and tireless angel for my progress, was taught a great deal from his wisdom, particularly regarding the decency of the morale of a priest. I will eternally keep his advice, especially his words that the Church never owes us anything, but that we owe everything to the Church always.

I offer much gratitude for life to my benefactor His Eminence Metropolitan Damaskinos of Didymoteiho and Orestiada, who, although I was an "outsider son", showed me profuse paternal love, care and benefaction.

I also address filial gratitude to His Eminence Paul Metropolitan of Glyfada, who works hard and despite financial difficulties traveled willingly from Greece to be present at my joy today. Besides, since my student years he has always been with me, as a manifold benefactor.

Likewise, I owe gratitude to His Eminence Chrysostomos Metropolitan of Messinia, who completely changed my life. I owe him this day, even though his absence puts a cloud over my joy. May the Lord God give to him abundantly according to his loving heart towards me.

Countless thanks should be given to all those who are here with me at this moment, the venerable Clergy, who traveled from Jerusalem, Crete, Didymoteihos and other places in Greece, as well as to family and friends, particularly those of the blessed community of the City of Alexander.

Your Beatitude, please allow my thoughts to fly from the God-walked land of the Nile to my most beautiful homeland, that I may venerate land of the Holy Monastery of the Virgin of Voulkanou. That is where I was reborn twice. The first was at my Holy Baptism and afterwards at my monastic tonsure. I am grateful because at this holy monastery, in the faces of the Fathers of the Brotherhood, numbering among them also all the Clergy and the Laity of the Patriarchal Mansion as well as my beloved brother Stephanos, I am able to say that I found the brothers which I did not have in the flesh.

I piously ask for the prayers of the Nuns from the famous Convent in Kalamata and of the Holy Hermitage of the Prophet Joel as well. These simple souls played an enormous role in my life since I was a child, especially during the difficult times from the death of my mother.

Please allow me also to kiss in thought the relics of my parents Ioannis and Glykeria. I address to them my infinite gratitude, because they planted within me and cultivated the seed of my dedication to the Church.

In conclusion, I would not be able to find a more appropriate seal for my address than the words which, on a day like today 57 years ago, were said by the ever remembered Metropolitan Chrysostomos Themelis of Messinia, during his own ordination as Bishop. He is the sacred person for whom the patristic "even in silence you can teach and even just looking you can build", is fitting. He is the figure which through his strictness which was misunderstood by many, sculpted deep within me obedience, humility and submissiveness to the Church. I yield to him asking for his blessing.

"To You now, Lord, the Arch Shepherd Christ, I lift up my eyes and once again I thank You, because you deemed me the unworthy, worthy of the rank of Bishop and elevated me as a shepherd. Lead me, Lord, by Your protection so that I may lead Your people. You called me Lord and behold I throw open the doors of my soul. May Your pure Spirit come into me innermost being directly and bounteously, brighten me and strengthen me. May Your Grace come to me Lord, into my squalid heart, as a cooling breeze. May the Paraclete come as at Pentecost, performing the most decent change. I have as mediator for this my Lady Theotokos of Voulkano and the custodian of our Holy Monastery Savvas the Sanctified. O Lord, save me. O Lord, have mercy on me. Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord. Amen. Amen."

After the Eucharistic Gathering, His Beatitude awarded the Supreme Order of St Savvas the Sanctified to His Eminence Metropolitan Paul of Glyfada for his contribution to the missionary efforts in Zimbabwe and Mozambique and the Cross of St Savvas to the Council Member of many years standing of the Holy Churches of St Nicholas in Ibrahimia and Venerable Savvas the Sanctified in Alexandria, Mr. Nicholas Eleftheriou. In conclusion His Beatitude blessed the Christmas market of the Lyceum of Greek Ladies in Alexandria.