

ENTHRONEMENT OF HIS GRACE PANTELEIMON BISHOP OF BRAZZAVILLE AND GABON

On Sunday, 14th April 2013, the enthronement of His Grace Panteleimon, Bishop of Brazzaville and Gabon, took place at the Holy Cathedral of St. Dimitrios in the city of Pointe Noire in the Congo, site of the Diocese, with the Patriarchal prayers and blessings of His Beatitude Theodoros II, Pope and Patriarch of Alexandria and All Africa.

A Hierarchal Liturgy preceded the enthronement led by His Eminence Gregory Metropolitan of Cameroon, representing His Beatitude, together with all the clergy of the Diocese of Brazzaville.

Addressing the newly-enthroned Bishop, His Grace Panteleimon, His Eminence Gregory of Cameroon said:

“Your Grace Panteleimon, Bishop of Congo-Brazzaville and Gabon, I am particularly honoured to be present today at your enthronement, representing His Beatitude Theodoros II, Pope and Patriarch of Alexandria and All Africa, who, through me, blesses the beginning of your new Ecclesiastical Ministry and blesses also the open-hearted people of your Diocese.

Today, Your Grace Panteleimon, I came to be with you to officially and sacramentally inaugurate a new relationship which the Mother Church of Alexandria demands of you.

Today, before God and man, you begin the great sacrament of paternity which will connect you for life with the blessed clergy of St Mark.

` In every Divine Liturgy done in your Diocese from now on, when the words “For our Father and Archbishop Panteleimon.....let us pray to the Lord” you will be reminded of the eternal duty of Paternal ministry that you have for your Flock.

You have the great blessing of being the first Bishop of this Holy Diocese; before you, though, the efforts of the Very Reverend Archimandrite Theologos preceded, who with his talents which God gave him, placed serious organizational foundations for the presence of the Orthodox Church in this hospitable country. He is a valuable colleague, assistant and worker in the missions. His work is acknowledged by all, as are the quantity, quality and quiet tirelessness of his character. The Church of St Mark stands beside him, eternally grateful for this.

Your Grace and holy Brother, your ministry up to this point in our Holy Church, in various positions, the crowning honour of which is your service as Chief Secretary of the Ancient Patriarchate of Alexandria, revealed to us all the talents with which you have been graced by God and you, as a faithful servant did not hide them, but worked and processed them and were shown to be “a faithful and wise steward” which “the master set over his household”(Luke 12:42).

You are called on here, in this field of Africa, to be firstly their “Father”, close up and from afar, returning them to the Paternal home of our holy Church with whatever efforts, pain, and sacrifices the meaning of Father demands and includes.....you are called on to deny yourself and sacrifice every disposition of superiority and strength to the Sacrament of those coming to the Paternal home.

For you, Missions were unknown until recently; you would hear from us who are older about them, and as another Maria “you have chosen the good portion which will not be taken away from you” (Luke 10:41) and have chosen to come and contribute to our humble efforts of sowing the Gospel word.

Great and benevolent was the moment of your decision, my Brother... don't ever regret this decision you made.

Essentially, your decision is a decision of co-crucifixion with the passion and sufferings of the African nations; it is a holy decision because you are well aware that everyone who is crucified does not come down from the Cross alone, but is always brought down off it. And in spite of his crucifiers is always resurrected by Him who made possible the road to Resurrection via the Cross. He will be your comfort and your life-giving strength. He will be your friend and brother and father and loved one. He will be your inspiration and your work.

Your Grace, holy brother, Africa is our foreign land and we leave behind what we are sure of in our homelands and are called on to live without all that so that we can create what will arise from this meeting with the people of Africa.

We are called on to forsake the Nazareth of our family and church security and self-sufficiency and to travel the road firstly to the Galilee of the Gentiles, to enter the synagogues and the meetings of the People and to interpret scripture focusing on the experience of Orthodox theology.....to climb the mountains, to cross the deserts and to bless the poor and needy, orphans and widows, those in mourning and the merciful, those pure in heart and humble in spirit.....and somewhere there, between Jerusalem and Jericho to meet the half-dead and naked brother and to minister to him so that he can praise through us the name of "the Lord".

You are called on my brother to speak of Christ, in other words of Truth and Life and the Way to people, who for centuries have remained in the lies of magic and trickery, in a world which is surrounded daily by death, in a world which seeks its path among the universe.

Your word about Christ will have to have this dynamic and the passion to surpass the transfer of historic knowledge about Him, to surpass the effort of remembrance of the ecclesiastical way of existence and to incarnate Christ Himself before those who hear your words about Him.

This is the essential difference of the word of Missionaries from the word of all the other Shepherds of the ancient Churches...and you will see, my Brother, Christ Himself affirming your words about Him, "through the signs which will follow"..... thus creating "a memory of Christ" which seeks to be reborn daily through the "mystery of Regeneration".

This will be your struggle and don't expect to find understanding from anyone, because, you must not forget that, even in the "Paternal home", there are always the elder law abiding brothers who will react to even the joyful judgments of the Father according to whatever the narrowness of their -otherwise - loving hearts can comprehend.

Put your hand today to the plough and start to work on the Lord's commandments in this corner of Africa and you will see "the heavens open and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of man", who will be praised in this land too with your efforts.

Your Grace and holy Brother, your years will be many, productive, prolific and full of divine Mercy and "Have strength, a good journey and be the head of the situation» all that the spirit of this world deems that exists in this life as its own prey.

In his Enthronement speech, His Grace the Bishop said:

"Your Eminence Gregory Metropolitan of Cameroon, Representative of His Beatitude

Theodoros II, Pope and Patriarch of Alexandria and All Africa, Venerable Representatives of other Christian Faiths, Honourable Rulers, gathered here in the joy of the Orthodox Church of Congo-Brazzaville and of Gabon, Reverend Fathers of our Diocese, Dear Brothers and colleagues of the pastoral efforts of our Church, Blessed people of God,

This ecclesiastical ceremony is well known as the "enthronement of the Bishop" which means his placement on a Bishop's Throne. Most certainly the promotion to a Bishop comprises the highest honour which the Church reserves for a priest, but also the highest responsibility which it places on him.

Having been elevated to the Hierarchal Throne and standing "as an image and type of Christ" – which is the reason why on the Hierarchal Throne there is always the icon of the Great High Priest Christ – is the visible Head of the Diocese, the guarantor of its unity and of the Christian faith in it, its Father and its Shepherd.

Therefore, as a Shepherd, he leads his Diocese with paternal love and affection but has no right to allow the diversion of the priests and the faithful from all that the Orthodox Church professes according to the teaching of its Founder Jesus Christ and to the unchanged and inalterable decision of the Holy Seven Ecumenical Councils.

With these ecclesiastical experiences and traditions, following a proposal by His Beatitude Pope and Patriarch Theodoros II, the Holy Synod of the Patriarchate of Alexandria and All Africa established, on 7th October 2010, the Holy Diocese of Brazzaville and Gabon, seconding these two countries from the spiritual and administrative jurisdiction of the Holy Metropolises of Central Africa And Cameroon respectively, to which up until then you belonged and from which all you Orthodox Christian were spiritually nurtured.

On 21st November 2012, our "Mother Church", our Patriarchate, decided that the moment had come to elect the first Bishop to undertake the responsibility of the future course and spiritual development of the Church of the Congo and Gabon.

And so today I stand before you as your Shepherd, whom the Church decreed should lift on my weak shoulders the enormous responsibility for which I will be answerable to the Arch-Shepherd Christ on the Day of Judgment.

My dear brothers and sisters,

The Gospel of Jesus Christ, the teaching of the Apostles and the Saints, their life, witness and example, together with the decisions taken by the Holy Seven Ecumenical Councils, determine the Orthodox Christian path of us all. This secure path of spiritual salvation which Orthodoxy has maintained unaltered and unadulterated for 2000 years, is the stable journey also of my hierarchy which officially begins today.

According to all the above, the Church Body, blessed by the Holy Sacraments, with the Divine Eucharist at its epicenter, remains inseparably united with Christ the Saviour, and is expressed through the core of the Church which is the Parish.

The importance of the Parish Community for the Christian life of the faithful is decisive. Within it the Orthodox faith and Orthodox ethos is born and developed as a total attitude to life, not only spiritually but also socially. The parish nurtures spiritual life, guides the spiritual struggle, leads to repentance and to reconciliation. The Parish sanctifies, unites, safeguards, heals, embraces!

Within it is created the social spirit. Lay brothers and sisters participate in the administration of the churches and in the humanistic effort. In the Parish personal

events, such as birth, baptism, marriage or even death, become collective – social, and strengthen the unity of the local community.

And at the epicenter of all these events is the Parish Priest, as a shepherd, spiritual father, brother, friend, adviser, support, fellow. The Priest is the Father of the Parish Community who with total obedience to and in collaboration with the Bishop, leads the Parish with deep and genuine faith in Christ, who through infinite love was sacrificed for the salvation of mankind. In the exact same way, the priest, mimicking the example of the Lord, must live with a heart filled with faith, love, forgiveness, understanding, patience, obedience and a spirit of contribution and sacrifice for the faithful of his Parish, according to the words of the Lord: “I am the good Shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep” (John 10:11).

My brothers and sisters,

Facing you, the people of God, I feel that at this moment in my personal history God is not calling me to correct others, but to offer according to my humble abilities, those motives which will challenge others to decide by themselves to change their lives.

My new ministry begins at a critical time for the entire world. In contemporary times there are no longer self-explanatory things. Societies are constantly changing, science is progressing and developing, technology is progressing, and human behavior is shifting.

However, we Christians, have an unshakeable message to preach to the world continually, a message which comes from Christ Himself, when he was still walking on this earth: “I am the light of the world; he who follows me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life” (John 8: 12). He also said: “Go out and teach all nations baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to keep all that I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:19).

So, a Church which does not open itself to the world and which does not freely and effortlessly challenge every man, regardless of tribe, language or culture, to participate in this unique event of coming close to Christ, the Light and Hope of the world, is not only a “closed Church”, but also a “non-existent Church” because the Church is exactly this: mankind’s meeting with God.

It is this meeting which the ancient Patriarchate of Alexandria ministers to sacrificially in the vastness of the African continent and it is for this meeting that I humbly make myself available to exchange my life serving in this blessed and hospitable corner of the world, Congo-Brazzaville and Gabon.

So here I am, my brothers and sisters, amongst you as first and last, as the leader and the servant.

In conclusion, please allow me to thank from the bottom of my heart His Eminence Gregory Metropolitan of Cameroon, who always surrounds me with great love and came with much joy from the Cameroon to represent His Beatitude Theodoros II, Pope and Patriarch of Alexandria and All Africa, my much respected and beloved Father and Benefactor, beside whom I lived and learned for seven continuous years.

I wholeheartedly thank my dear priests of the local Church for their warm welcome and their unhindered disposition for collaboration, as well as all my colleagues in this pastoral effort. I particularly thank my predecessor in the pastoral ministry of this place, His Eminence Ignatios, presently Metropolitan of Pentapolis, formerly Central Africa, under whose spiritual guidance the pastoral effort was

developed to the point where he asked to have a Bishop.

I gratefully stand before the many and productive years of missionary contribution of the Very Reverend Archimandrite Theologos Chrysanthakopoulos, who served during the past two years as Patriarchal Vicar of the Diocese. The work done by Father Theologos would not have reached this point if there was not the unconditional assistance of the Apostoliki Diakonia of the Church of Greece, the Brotherhood of External Missions of Thessaloniki, other missionary societies in Greece and elsewhere, and particularly the Society of External Missions from Patras, "Protoklytos", who exceptionally supported and continues to support our missionary efforts.

With great joy I greet the representatives of the other Christian faiths and the representatives of the Officials of the State and of this city, first among whom is His Excellency Mr. Seraphim Bhalat, Representative of the President of the Republic of Congo, who honour the Orthodox Church of the country with their presence, as well as the representatives of the Diplomatic Missions, who with kindness accepted our invitation. I look forward to exceptional collaboration with all for the benefit of the noble people of the Congo.

I pray with all the strength of my heart, that the Most Merciful God will bless His Excellency the President of the Republic of the Congo Mr. Denise Sassou Nguesso, our blessed country and all of you. I ask you please all to pray for me too".