

**Address of Acceptance
of
Archimandrite Alexis (Trader), Bishop-elect of Bethesda
The Cathedral of Saint Nicholas
January 24, 2020**

*Your Beatitude, Metropolitan Tikhon;
Your Eminence, Metropolitan Alexios;
Your Eminence, Archbishop Melchisedek;
Your Eminence, Archbishop Michael;
Your Eminence, Archbishop David;
Your Grace, Bishop Paul;
Your Grace, Bishop Daniel,*

*My brother monastics, dear concelebrants at the altar, my spiritual children, family and friends,
brothers and sisters in Christ,*

After twenty-three years of sojourning in Greece, I have come home. For the love of God and for the salvation of my soul, I went to Greece as young idealistic monk from Saint Tikhon's Monastery. For the love of God and for the sake of those in the land of my birth, I stand now before you this day as a much-older priestmonk from the Holy Mountain of Athos. I stand here humbly and with the fear of God in the face of a frankly daunting task: to guide those in my care, so that they become not merely good people, but rather radiant bearers of our marvelous Christ.

The greatest of Saints, such as Saint Gregory the Theologian whose memory we keep this day, fled from such a task, for they still felt insufficiently skilled to ply "the art of arts and science of sciences," that is, to wield the shepherd's staff. Saint Gregory himself felt that his soul was not yet a sufficiently perfected mirror reflecting the radiant glory of the Triune God.¹ And so he wrote, "I did not, nor do I now, think myself qualified to rule a flock or herd, or to have authority over the souls of men."² In his presence today, what can I possibly say? Only the words of the Prophet David come to mind: "I know my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me."³ And yet, here I stand, not only trusting in our God, "full of compassion, and gracious, longsuffering, and plenteous in mercy and truth,"⁴ but also knowing full well that there is none so great a God as our God, for He is the God that does wonders.⁵ That I may serve Him well, that I may serve the Church well, that I may serve you well is one more miracle that I seek from our wonderful Savior.

Since the time his Beatitude was Bishop of Eastern Pennsylvania, he has gently, yet persistently, invited me to give lectures or lead retreats in the United States. And for one reason or another, I have always declined. But when asked to speak at the 2018 All-American Council in Saint

¹ Gregory the Theologian *Orations* 2.7 PG 35.413c and 2.16 PG 35.425ab.

² Gregory the Theologian *Orations* 2.9 PG 35.417b.

³ Psalm 50:3.

⁴ Psalm 86:15.

⁵ Psalm 77:13-14.

Louis, my spontaneous response was a whole-hearted yes. I felt deeply that this was of God; that this was the appointed time, and of this I had no doubt, but in its stead a deep and abiding peace. And that was the first step along a path that has led me back home to this very place and to this very hour. The gate has been narrow and the road hard, but I have from the very outset, been assured that it leads to life and that I am blessed to be among those who have found it.⁶

The Venerable Hierarchs of the Holy Orthodox Church have asked me to join their ranks as a bishop of Christ's holy flock. They are summoning me to live no longer for myself, but for the sake of those for whom I will become a bishop.⁷ They are seeking for me to offer myself entirely to the Holy Trinity and His sacred icons, His people. They have elected me to guide and to listen, to inspire and to be inspired, to teach forgiveness and to model humility, but above all to guard the unifying peace that waters the green pastures where the faithful can grow and mature into the fullness of Him that fills all in all.⁸ They have charged me to preach the Gospel of repentance and to encourage all to be of good cheer, for our Christ has overcome the world.

I accept this call of the Lord with gratitude for His plenteous mercy that endures forever and with hope in His divine grace that completes that which is lacking. I accept this call in the absolute certainty of His love for us and in my unwavering desire to love Him in thought, word, and deed. I accept this call fully aware that growth in Christ's love includes the gift of loving those in my care, calling them my friends, and being ever mindful of our Savior's words "greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends."⁹

It is only right that I offer up my deep sense of thanksgiving to God for the many blessed souls who have guided me, stood by me, and prepared me for my future service to the Church. I'm grateful to my parents, Merrill and Mary Trader, whose Christ-like love was wide enough to support their son in becoming a monk, self-sacrificial enough to accept my departure for the Holy Mountain of Athos, and patient enough to await for the day when I would return home once again. I am grateful to my teachers who inspired me to dedicate my life to the truth and to my friends who have encouraged me to take daring steps trusting in God and believing in myself to do something of value in this world. I am thankful for my spiritual fathers, the late Fr. Vladimir Borichevsky, Metropolitan Herman, and Elder Philotheos of the Monastery of Karakallou on the Holy Mountain of Athos. Through them in differing ways, I've come to know that nothing is more important than making the Gospel itself the very heart and soul of my life.

I am grateful to the monks of the Holy Monastery of Saint Tikhon of Zadonsk, past and present, as well as for the monks of the Holy Mountain who have taught me the ways of service, the ways of repentance, and the ways of prayer. I am grateful to those communities for showing me how

⁶ Matthew 7:14.

⁷ Cf. Athanasius the Great *Letter to Dracontius* PG 25.b.523a-533d.

⁸ Ephesians 1:23.

⁹ John 15:13.

to be strictly observant and how to be generously flexible, so that by God's grace I might be "made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some."¹⁰ I must single out the present Abbott of Saint Tikhon's Monastery, Archimandrite Sergius, who welcomed me back, encouraged me, and supported me in every conceivable way. Thank you, dear Father, from the bottom of my heart. I am grateful to my spiritual children, many of whom are present here today after having crossed the Atlantic out of deep affection in Christ. Weeping with them that weep and rejoicing with them that rejoice, I have seen the most wonderful of miracles that can occur in this life: a soul drawing closer to our Lord Jesus. I can never be sufficiently grateful for the trust you have placed in me by permitting me to serve at the altar of your souls.

I am especially thankful to the venerable brotherhood that is warmly welcoming me into its fold, the Holy Synod of Bishops of the Orthodox Church of America that has elected me as an auxiliary bishop. I look to each of you with reverence, respect, and the highest regard. I intend to learn from your wisdom and benefit from your experience. I aspire to imitate your love for your flocks and your whole-hearted devotion to Christ's holy Church. I humbly ask for your holy prayers. And last of all, I would like to thank the one who is first, his beatitude, Metropolitan Tikhon. I have admired your kindness and your peacefulness for thirty-six years. You know my strengths; you know my weaknesses better than most, yet you have dared to call me back to serve at your side. I will do my best, God helping me, to be worthy of your trust. To everyone else whose very presence here today supports me and strengthens me, you have filled my heart with gratitude. I pray that God send down His blessings on you for your kindness one hundred-fold.

When the Apostle Peter was thrown into prison, the Church prayed fervently on his behalf. And God answered: an Angel descended from heaven, shackles were loosed, and the freed Apostle walked out through the prison gates reaching the house of Mary where he was a heaven-sent consolation for the faithful gathered therein. I too seek the prayers of the Church gathered here today that I too may be freed of whatever restrains me from doing God's work, so that I might go forth and console the people of God. I seek the prayers of the holy hierarchs here present, the zealous priests of the Most High God, the venerable monks, the godly lay folk, the God-fearing old and the God-loving young, that I may serve you as worthily as I can by the grace of God. I also seek the prayers and intercessions from that great cloud of witnesses whose very life and breath have been and continues to be our Lord Jesus Christ. I take refuge in the intercessions of His Most Pure Mother. I seek the prayers of the holy Apostles Peter and Paul whose monastery on Mount Athos I served for a decade. I ask for the protection of Saint Demetrios the Myrrh-gusher whom I served for thirteen years at his convent in Northern Greece. I trust in the supplications of the holy hierarchs Saint Tikhon of Zadonsk and Saint Tikhon of Moscow from the monastery of my first repentance. And I seek the prayers of Saint Gregory the Theologian whose memory we providentially begin to celebrate on this very eve.

¹⁰ 1 Cor 9:22.

With your prayers, with their prayers, I dare to believe that with God all things are possible and to say yes, God helping me, reverend fathers, yes.

In closing, I would like to borrow the words of Saint Gregory the Theologian after his own ordination and make them my humble prayer: “May the God of peace... Who places kings upon thrones, and raises up the poor out of the dust... who chose David His servant and took him away from the sheepfolds though he was the least and youngest of the sons of Jesse, may [the same Lord] hold me by my right hand and guide me according to His counsels... that I may wisely shepherd His flock....And may He give His people the strength and power that they may stand before Him as a resplendent and spotless flock, worthy of the fold on high, in the dwelling place of those who rejoice, in the splendor of the saints, so that in His temple everyone, both flock and shepherds together may glorify God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.”¹¹

¹¹ Gregory the Theologian *Orations* 2.116 PG 35.513c.