

In an atmosphere of joyful sorrow

Ordination of a New Presbyter

With the blessing of His Eminence, Metropolitan Cyprian, our pious brother in Christ, Constantine Soteriades, was Ordained a Deacon on Saturday, December 2, 2007 (Old Style), and a Presbyter on Sunday, December 3, 2007 (Old Style), at the Cathedral Church of the Monastery of Sts. Cyprian and Justina, Phyle, Attica.

His Grace, Bishop Klemes of Gardikion performed the Ordination to the Diaconate and His Grace, Bishop Cyprian of Oreoi, Acting President of the Holy Synod, the Ordination to the Priesthood, in the presence of a multitude of the faithful, who called out with a great voice the acclamation “Αξιός!” (“He is worthy!”)

The new Priest, who was Ordained at the recommendation of his spiritual Father, Protopresbyter Apostolos Kagioglou, in order to serve the needs of the parishes of the Metropolis of Oropos and Phyle, was born in 1970, in Kazakhstan (former USSR), to Greek parents. He came to Greece in



1992, married Helen Konstantinidou, and presently lives in Acharnes, Attica. He has belonged to our ecclesiastical jurisdiction for over a decade, is distinguished for his simplicity and kindness, and will continue the profession whereby he earns his living, so as not to be a burden on the Church. He has undertaken his theological training in the Saint Paul and Saint John of San Francisco seminary program at the Holy Monastery of Saints Cyprian and Justina, under the direction of His Grace, Bishop Klemes of Gardikion.

We wholeheartedly wish him a fruitful and blameless Priestly ministry in the Vineyard of the Lord, in humility and fear of God.

His Grace, the Acting President of the Holy Synod, delivered the following inspired Address to him after his Ordination to the Priesthood:

Fourth Address

Words of Exhortation at an Ordination (I)

*The hands of a Priest are bearers of Divine fire,
and the Immaculate Theotokos is his “concelebrant”*

My beloved brother, Father Constantine; fellow minister, fellow presbyter, Concelebrant, and fellow servant in Christ of our Lord and Savior:

I have the especial honor and blessing of our Lord to welcome you to the venerable domain of the honorable Priesthood of our most holy Orthodox Church.

I receive you with an embrace of love in Christ on behalf of our much-revered Elder, Metropolitan Cyprian, and the honorable Members of our Holy Synod.

The atmosphere, today, in which we celebrate the Divine Liturgy and your entry into the sacred sanctuary of the Priesthood is an atmosphere of *joyful sorrow*.

• **Sacred joy** and sacred *sorrow* fill all of our hearts: Our spiritual Father, Guide, and Elder has already spread his two great wings of **Orthodoxy and Orthopraxia**, and is slowly and gently being raised from the corruptible and earthly to the incorruptible and Heavenly.

He will have a good journey; for the winds are fair.... The Holy and luminous Angels will accompany him, guaranteeing him a *fair passage*.

Let us all bid him farewell! May he have a good journey! And may our All-Holy Lady grant him peace, support, and consolation!

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Yesterday, my beloved brother and concelebrant in Christ, Bishop Klemes of Gardikion, elevated you to the first rank of the Priesthood, Ordaining you a Deacon. Today, through me, the unworthy one, the Grace of the Divine Comforter has in-



roduced you into the Holy of Holies of the God-given and Christ-given Priesthood. You already mystically participate in the Priesthood of our Christ and Savior.

I do not intend, at this moment, to expound on what this means to you; for the atmosphere of *joyful sorrow* prevents me. I am also restrained by your simplicity, which is so enviable, revealing as it does a heart that is humble and pure.

I would, then, prefer first of all to convey to you a wholehearted wish: May the Most Blessed *Theotokos* vouchsafe you to Liturgize to the end of your life **“with a pure heart, mind atremble, and a contrite soul.”** When you stand before the dread Altar, transform yourself into a burning and unconsumed bush. And when you lift your Priestly hands to the East, lift up with you the People of God, to that place wherein are the unceasing sound of those who keep festival and the endless gladness of those who behold the glory of God.

* * *

Now, at the commencement of your journey as a Priest, I would like to bring to your attention two moving events that took place in our times, which are so didactic in their simplicity that they contain an inexhaustible theological treasure, condensing, in a nutshell, the essence of your most lofty ministry.

The first event is as follows.

Once, a married Priest, holding a five-year-old boy by the hand (his own child), was going to Church for Vespers.

The young boy chattered on about one thing or another as he walked next to his father, until finally, completely unexpectedly, he asked the following question:

‘Why, papa, during the Divine Liturgy, when you are about to sanctify the Holy Communion, do you cry? And then fly up to Heaven and return again holding a lot of fire in your hands? And why do you first put it on the bread and then on the Chalice with the wine? Why do you not burn up? I have never seen your hands burned!’

The sanctified Priest stopped short, speechless with astonishment, and then fearfully asked his son:

‘When did you see all that, my boy?’

‘Why, yesterday, on Sunday!’ answered the little boy.

The Priest then said to his son in a very serious tone:

‘Be careful, my boy, not to tell that to anyone until I die. Do you hear? Not to anyone!’

‘Fine, papa. Here, I’m kissing the Cross!’ And he made the sign of the Cross with his fingers and kissed it.

• **When** he was a man of fifty, the boy himself recounted these things to a contemporary spiritual Father.

As soon as the Priest’s son finished his story about his father, he added:

‘Father, I recently sinned by condemning two Priests for some bad deeds they committed, as these things were conveyed to me. Yes, I judged them, insulted them, and compared them with my sanctified Priest-father. **Now then, last night, my father came to me in my sleep, as radiant as the sun! He looked at me gravely, and sternly said to me:**

“Do you not know that in the person of those Priests you have judged me, your father? Or do we not all make mistakes? And when you judge any Priest, my boy, as I have often told you, you judge God Himself, Who made him a Priest!”

And the son of that holy Priest then began to weep!*

Here, then, my fellow Priest and concelebrant, Father Constantine, in this revelation, we see that the hands of a Priest are bearers of Divine Fire, Which transforms the bread into the Body of Christ and the wine into His Blood, *that the world might be nourished and live.*

May our lay brethren also beware, however, of the dreadful and God-fighting sin of making accusations against Priests.

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The **second** event was recounted in 2002 by a Christian whose grandfather was a virtuous Priest in a village in the region of Drama.

When he was young, he helped his grandfather, Papa-Giorges, in the Altar. Papa-Giorges was a refugee from Asia Minor, following the massacres in Smyrna and the burning of

the city. Though uneducated, he was extremely pious.

The village Chapel was poor, and had a floor inexpertly laid with shoddy tiles, upon which Papa-Giorges would trip every so often.

- Once, on a Saturday, as he was Liturgizing in the presence of five or six of the faithful, he tripped during the Great Entrance and nearly fell down with the Holy Gifts.

His grandson then suddenly saw **a radiant woman holding on to him so that he would not fall, and who said to him: ‘Do not be afraid, I have a firm hold of you. Proceed.’**

Trembling with emotion, Papa-Giorges entered with her into the Holy Altar. **She shut the Beautiful Gate and handed him the censer for him to cense** the Holy Gifts after they had been placed on the Holy Table.

The young grandson watched all of this in astonishment, speechless and stunned at the splendor of that majestic Lady. His soul—and this is something that he could not forget—was inundated with sacred wonder and awe. However, he could not in any way understand how the censer, which he had been holding in his little hand, was suddenly in the hands **of that radiant Lady, the Most Holy Theotokos and Queen of Heaven!**

The boy came to his senses and saw his grandfather weeping. At each petition, exclamation, and prayer, he continually repeated the words **‘my Panagia.’**

‘Help us, save us, have mercy on us... **my Panagia.’**

‘An Angel of peace... **my Panagia.’**

‘Through the compassions... **my Panagia.’**

‘It is meet and right to hymn thee... **my Panagia.’**

During the sanctification of the Holy Gifts, the same thing happened, and even more so at the exclamation ‘Especially for our All-Holy,’ where there were sobs, many tears, and, repeatedly, the words **‘my Panagia.’** This continued until the end of the Divine Liturgy.

After he had finished cleaning the Chalice, he said to his grandchild: **‘You will not tell anyone what you saw and heard.... No one, or the Panagia will cut off your tongue.’**

- During the occupation (1941-1944), the *Panagia* again

appeared to Papa-Giorges, in order to help and support him, on Christmas Day, two years before he reposed.

From that time on, Papa-Giorges would murmur the words ‘*my Panagia*’ continually, day and night. His fellow villagers—who were also his rational sheep—would good-naturedly “tease” him about this phrase.

He reposed in sanctity. One morning, when Papa-Giorges was feeling unwell, his son (the narrator’s father) opened the door to his room and **saw him kneeling, with his elderly hands raised and bathed in an otherworldly light, murmuring: ‘My Panagia... My Panagia... My Panagia, I am coming...’** She, whose name never left his lips or his heart, came to take his soul.**

In this second revelation, my fellow Priest and concelebrant, Father Constantine, we are given the opportunity to understand why the *Theotokos* is the “venerable boast of devout Priests,” as we salute her in the *Akathist Hymn (Oikos Ψ)*

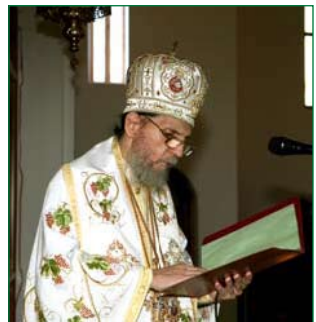
Pious celebrants boast with a sacred boast in Christ, not only because our Immaculate Lady strengthens, guides, and protects them on their journey towards purification, illumination, and deification, but also because, without her, they are unable to celebrate the Divine Liturgy; if they do not sense the *Theotokos*, who knew not man, as their “concelebrant,” they fear to approach the unconsumed bush of the sacred Altar, lest they be burned.

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Walk the path of your Priestly ministry rejoicing, glorifying, and thanking Christ our Savior.

But “be watchful and pray,” so that **your hands might always be bearers of the Divine Fire.** The Most Blessed *Theotokos* will support you in this struggle, so that you might not be consumed, but rather illumined and sanctified.

We humbly pray that the All-Hymned Maiden ever *concelebrate* with you, both at the earthly and the Heavenly Altar, through the God-



evoking prayers of our much-revered Elder, Metropolitan Cyprian.

May God be with you!

†Bishop Cyprian of Oreoi,
Acting President of the Holy Synod

† Fourteenth Sunday of St. Luke,
December 3/16, 2007
Holy Prophet Sophonias

* Protopresbyter Stephanos K. Avagnostopoulos, *Hermeneia sten Theia Leitourgia mesa apo Pragmatika Gekonota kai Empeiries Hagion Hieron, Monachon, kai Piston* [Explanation of the Divine Liturgy Based on True Events and Experiences of Holy Priests, Monastics, and Faithful], §199 (Piræus: 2003), pp. 537-538.

** *Ibid.*, §107, pp. 250-251.