

Enthronement Speech

In 1998 when Metropolitan George Khodr addressed me on the eve of my ordination to the holy episcopacy, he said: "After us, you and a group of your companions will expand the body of Christ, in the East, and perhaps to the ends of the earth,". It did not occur to me then or to anyone else that he was hinting by his words that we would have a role beyond the East where we were born.

However, twenty-five years after - In the heart of the American society, whose culture is traditionally imprinted with Christ, and is ever thirsty to drink from the springs of His Holy Spirit - his word or his prophecy would be fulfilled.

I am here now among you in this blessed Archdiocese to accomplish together the great commission of rooting the church of Christ in the heart of the society in North America by witnessing to the beauty of Christ in our world today. A society which is searching for a witness to the Word of life.

In my youth, I read a reflection which left on me a permanent mark. This reflection was a dialogue between Christ and a weary priest. At the end of that contemplation, Christ says to the priest: I need your tongue to convey my words to the people, your heart to shower them with my love, your hands to carry my gifts to them, and your feet to lead them to my path. Then, I promised

the Lord to be the priest whom he desires. Since then, I continue to strive to stay faithful to this covenant.

Today, and after many years of serving Christ and His Church, I must confess I have not reached the level of this desired priesthood. But, despite my weaknesses and sins I still desire and continue to strive to be him with all my heart.

And I know that my Lord wants for this my pursuit not to stop. And that what strengthens me in this endeavor, is His acceptance of my pledge, and His showering upon me a personal care and unspeakable tenderness, even during the most difficult and trying times of my ministry.

He was always by my side, strengthening me when I got tired, filling me with hope when I was close to despair, and supporting me when my inner being was shaken by the responsibility of caring for his people and by the grave task of leading them.

He taught me by his care something very important, and still does, that I should serve His church, and therefore I should be His instrument and make His church as He wants it. Thus, He made me always to be cautious to follow His will, to consult Him, and ask for His blessing before embarking on any project, decision, or a move.

Today, as He has summoned me through you, and through his beatitude, our father the Patriarch, and the Holy Synod of Antioch, to serve this blessed

archdiocese and her people who carried on, and continue the responsibility of His royal priesthood, I promise Him that I will remain faithful to the ministry, and to what I learned in the company of the Lord during my past years of service.

Along with you, I will seek His will and blessing in every step we take together. And with you, I look forward to a future vision that has broad horizons, deep spiritual roots, open minded toward the current challenges, loves prayer, embraces everyone, and cares for all age groups, and for all our priests and people according to their needs and the challenges they face.

With you, I long for a living church in Christ, for us to be the one true family of Christ. I hope that we do not forget that we are called to achieve the salvation of ourselves and the world we live in.

Now, I will not promise you a specific program. Our program is Christ and the splendor and care of His Church, which are entrusted to us together, because we are the church.

I will be with you and among you, always in your midst. We will seek together every work that serves our "Good News" and our salvation. Our projects must stem from a vision according to a vision based upon our joint expectations.

A vision that seeks a living Church, a flawless and blemish free bride, as much as it is possible for this vision to be achieved upon the earth.

A vision that establishes and roots the Church of Christ and her presence in these lands, nourishing her people with the true life that is derived from the permanent presence of the Holy Spirit in the midst of His Church and in her heart.

A vision that knows this world, its culture, and its needs, but one that remains faithful to the mind of Christ, and a witness for Him, regardless of the difficulties and the challenges.

This prompts me to ask the clergy for their cooperation, dedication, and the sanctity of a personal life, so that every clergy can be a servant of Christ according to the heart of Christ, and not according to his personal will.

And I ask our faithful people to be receptive to every call that makes His Church a true Church of Christ, so that the faithful people may participate in the development and the growth of His Church on the material front, spiritual and sanctity.

We need continuous growth in a life of holiness, prayer, purification, and love.

We need to build the culture of complementing one another, cooperation, and development of talents.

We need thoughtful care, and to spread the culture of love, and family spirit.

We need for each of us to feel that he is alive by others, and they are alive by him.

We need to develop the endowed properties and funds, service projects, and investment for the service of the “Good News” and the little brethren of Jesus.

We need to become witnesses to Christ and the true life in Him on a personal as well as a communal level.

We also need to be established in the spirit of the Antiochian Church, and thus know the history of her past and present, to discover her unique role in meeting others, whether they are brothers who agree or disagree with us.

And we need to work tirelessly every day to create her present and future.

The church of Antioch preserved the Orthodox faith, despite the numerous heresies that historically were born in her midst.

She confronted them through dialogue, and she did not neglect or ignore nor fall into intolerance or isolation.

Her arduous history taught her to seek the face of Christ and His kingdom, and to place her quest for Christ above all other needs.

Her history has purified it from seeking the glories and sweetness of this world, and she has never fallen into the trap of narrowness, nor given in to the worldly demands that could obscure the face of Christ and His living presence from His Church.

The Church of Antioch remained a witness to the unity of the nations in Christ, despite the many dangers that surround her and whose fires are flared up here and there.

The Antiochian spirit that we carry and must preserve, is unique by being rooted in the authentic Orthodox Christian faith.

And thus, she is capable to distinguish between the essence of the faith and the expressions it wore over time.

The Antiochian spirit is characterized by her unique ability to converse with others, pray for them.

While it can distinguish between personally, loving them and rejecting their stand if our Christian conscience does not allow agreeing with it.

As the Antiochian Church, we must remain able to fulfill the role of the bridge that connects all parties to each other with Christ.

I know that the temptations and challenges that confront us and surround us from every direction are many.

But we must continue through Christ “to be in this world, but not of this world.” as He commanded us before His Passion.

Beloved, all this is given to us, and will increase, if we solely seek to be like Christ, and His mind amid this world.

I ask your prayers that I will be faithful to Him and loyal to you, so that while we are in this earthly world, we may together walk toward the fulfilment of His heavenly kingdom hoping to enjoy it in its fullness in the age to come.

I extend my hands and open my heart to you and await your cooperation. Help me to be the father who embraces you in Christ, and for this staff that I received a tool to pave the way to the kingdom of God rather than for discipline and correction.

Let us cooperate together to spend our time and energies, not on the search for the ways of reconciliation and solutions to the problems that we create with our own hands, but rather on building, growth and developing.

As for my brothers in the Assembly of Orthodox bishops who are present with us today and who are absent from us, I will be a brother to them.

We will bear together the responsibility of witnessing to the great Orthodox heritage with which we are entrusted.

We will seek together the trace of Christ in all faces and in all places of His dominion, so that no one or nothing that had been entrusted to us is left outside the bridal chamber of Christ.

We will not deafen our ears from hearing the witness of our brethren in the non-Orthodox churches.

We will strive to be strengthened by the experience of others who seek the face of the Lord amid the world.

In our cooperation, we will witness and remain faithful to the holy Tradition that we received from the church Fathers of the first centuries which back then united us all in the life of the Church.

Keep me in your prayers as you are always in mine.

