

Grand Banquet Address

His Beatitude, Metropolitan Theodosius delivered this address during the Thirteenth All-American Council Grand Banquet in tribute of his 25th Primatial Annivesary at the Renaissance Orlando Resort Hotel, July 25, 2002.

Your Beatitude, Your Eminences, Your Graces, Very Reverend and Reverend Clergy, Dearly Beloved Faithful:

Glory to Jesus Christ!

I am deeply touched by the tribute that has been paid to me this evening through the many kind words that have been offered as well as through this beautifully-prepared video presentation of my life and archpastoral ministry. Looking back on my life and reflecting, most especially, upon my twenty-five years of primatial service as Metropolitan of All America and Canada, I am humbled and full of gratitude. I am humbled to know that our Lord Jesus Christ-the one True Shepherd of the flock-chose to call me to share in the ministry of caring for his sheep. And I am filled with gratitude to the Most Holy Trinity who, through Holy Baptism, first called me-as we are all called-to the service of Christ and His Church.

The kind and gracious words of so many people, the sights and sounds of the video we have just seen, and the memories that have been evoked this evening speak of the commitment, accomplishments, and service to Christ of literally thousands of people whose lives have touched mine throughout my twenty-five years as Metropolitan, thirty-five years as a bishop, forty-one years as a priest, and even before that, going back to the days of my childhood and youth. The video speaks not only of my archpastoral ministry, but of shared accomplishments. The video recalls our common history and those things that we have achieved together in service to Christ and His Church. For all of this, I am deeply grateful to God and to those who have supported me in my ministry and have shared my own vision for the Church. Therefore, I join my voice to that of David the Psalmist: "I give thanks to Thee, O Lord my God, with my whole heart, and I will glorify Thy Name forever" (Psalm 86:12).

Saint Basil the Great remind us: "When we speak of the plan of salvation for men, accomplished in God's goodness by our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who would deny that it was all made possible through the grace of the Spirit?" (On the Holy Spirit, 39.) I wish to confess that anything that has been accomplished has been only through the grace of the Holy Spirit who, despite my own unworthiness, has continuously blessed me and those who have labored with me.

Throughout my entire life, beginning with my childhood, I have had the loving support and encouragement of many people, beginning with my parents, of blessed memory, whose faith was based upon an unflinching trust in God and a deep and abiding love for Christ's Holy Church. I am grateful that the gift of their faith and their love for the Church was handed on to me-it has been the cornerstone of my entire ministry as priest, bishop, and primate.

From my earliest days, the Church was a part of my life. Our parish church-Saint John the Baptist in Canonsburg, Pennsylvania-was the center and focal point of my family's life. And an important role was played by Archpriest Basil and Matushka Mary Horsky of blessed memory. His pastoral care and spiritual guidance was a blessing not only to my family, and me but to all the faithful of our parish community. And, as Priest, Bishop, and Metropolitan, I have come to know countless other priests in that same mold of dedicated and selfless service to Christ's Church. The Orthodox Church in America has been greatly blessed in the priests and matushki that the Lord has called to serve His Church! I am grateful for their many sacrifices and unseen, unknown efforts on behalf of those who were entrusted to their care.

I wish also to acknowledge and thank my brother Bishops. I first recall those who have departed this life in the

hope of resurrection to life eternal, most especially the ever-memorable Metropolitan Ireney, Archbishop Kyprian, Archbishop Benjamin, and Archbishop John of Chicago. The example which they gave me-examples of loving and dedicated archpastors whose principle concern was always for the well being and growth of Christ's Holy Church-was the firm foundation upon which I established my own archpastoral and primatial ministry. For their example, loving support, and encouragement I will always be grateful.

I wish to acknowledge my brothers here present with me this evening: the members of the Holy Synod of Bishops, beginning with His Beatitude, Metropolitan Herman, whom God has now chosen to serve as Primate of the Holy Orthodox Church in America. I offer Your Beatitude my unfailing support and assure you of my prayers that the Lord will bless you with a double portion as you assume the yoke of responsibility that is now placed upon your shoulders. Dear brothers and sisters, pray for our new archpastor, Metropolitan Herman. I humbly ask you not to be quick to judge him or to compare him to me. I remember how frightened and overwhelmed I was when I was elected. By your prayers, God guided me and showed me the way I was to walk. I exhort you to help His Beatitude, Metropolitan Herman to be an even better leader and primate of the Orthodox Church in America.

Throughout these past twenty-five years, my brother bishops have always supported and encouraged me. Knowing that the primatial cross is a heavy one to bear, they have unfailingly offered their constant love and support and have assisted me so that together we might serve the Church and together guide it in the mission of proclaiming the Gospel of Christ to the peoples of North America.

I also wish to thank other hierarchs, my brothers, Archbishop Iakovos, Metropolitan Philip, a dear brother and co-worker, and most especially His Eminence, Archbishop Demetrios, Greek Orthodox Archbishop of America and President of the Standing Conference of Canonical Orthodox Bishops in America for his friendship and brotherly support. And I wish to assure them of my continual prayer for one canonical Orthodox Church in North America. May the Lord bless you as you continue to work toward this goal which the Lord Himself has commanded us to achieve.

I also wish to convey my deep personal gratitude and love to His Holiness, Patriarch Aleksy II, Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia who is represented here this evening in the person of His Eminence, Metropolitan Kirill of Smolensk and Kaliningrad. His Holiness has long been a personal friend. More importantly, he has been a constant support in the arduous task of working for the building up of Christ's Holy Church. His own example of tireless dedication to the work of the Church has often been an inspiration to me. For this I am grateful. I ask that Your Eminence relay to His Holiness my words and feelings of profound gratitude for his loving and brotherly support throughout these many years. Thank you, also, Your Eminence, for your own labors on behalf of the Church. Your presence here this evening is yet another reminder of the bond of history and faith which unites our two Churches.

I was recently informed by our Archivist, Alexis Liberovsky, that throughout the past thirty-five years of my episcopacy, I have ordained over 353 men to the diaconate and priesthood. It is uplifting to remember these ordinations. It is edifying, also, to know of the dedication and hard work of our priests and deacons throughout North America. Following the lead and guidance of their archpastors, as they minister and sacrifice on behalf of the faithful entrusted to them, the clergy of our Church are to be commended for their dedication to the Gospel mandate to proclaim the Gospel "to the ends of the earth." As I remember our clergy and the commitment to Christ and His Church that was made by each one of them on the day of their ordination, I am reassured in knowing that the Church in North America is on a firm and steady course. Because of such commitment, I am confident that the Orthodox Church in America will remain loyal to the missionary vision of Saint Herman, Saint Innocent, Saint Tikhon, and all those archpastors, clergy, monastics, and faithful who for over two hundred years have worked for the building up of the Kingdom of God on this continent. To be reminded that I have played a small role in this two-hundred and eight year history of missionary life and vision is truly humbling.

We cannot forget that the original band of missionaries sent to North America from Russia were monastics

who, through their monastic commitment had "died to the world" to live only for Christ. From the very beginning of the Church in North America, the Church's life and mission was marked by a monastic presence. This monastic presence continues to grow throughout North America. Again, I am encouraged and edified. I have felt the supportive prayers of our monastics throughout my primatial ministry. I am grateful for this and am grateful to know that the same prayerful support will now be given to His Beatitude, Metropolitan Herman as he assumes the archpastoral ministry with which he has now been entrusted.

This Council has had as its theme": "The Parish Community": Our Life in Christ." The parish is, indeed, the center and focal point for our life in Christ. Gathered together in communities throughout North America, Orthodox Christians live, share, and celebrate their faith. These parishes are served by the clergy who are appointed to minister to them. However, the parish can see no growth, no depth, no vitality without the love, faith, and dedication of the faithful laity.

Throughout these past twenty-five years of my primatial service I have been blessed with the support of many clergy and faithful whose work in church administration, most notably at the Chancery Office in Syosset, has often gone unrecognized by the Church. Without the support of those who have served me as Chancellor - first Protopresbyter Daniel Hubiak and for these past 13 years, Protopresbyter Robert S. Kondratich who also served me for many years before as my secretary - much of what has been accomplished never would have come to fruition. I wish to acknowledge the work and dedication of Archpriest Leonid Kishkovsky who has served in a variety of roles, always with attention and dedication. We pray that the Lord will strengthen him and grant him health in his present physical ailment. I also am grateful to my faithful secretaries and personal aides who have served me these past twenty-five years, most recently Archpriest David Brum and Reader Jason Vansuch. They, along with so many other clergy and faithful who have worked on the Chancery staff, have been a constant and steadfast support. Although often faced with the more difficult aspects of church life, those who have worked with me and for me have always remained constant in their dedication and commitment to the life and mission of the Church. For this I am profoundly grateful.

For all of you - my brother hierarchs, clergy, monastics, and faithful, I remain ever grateful to God. In the words of the Apostle Paul: "I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine making request for you with all joy, for your fellowship in the Gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun this good work in you will bring it to completion on the day of Christ Jesus" (Philippians 1:3-6).

As I now enter into my years of retirement, I wish to assure you all of my prayers. I was recently counseled by a visiting hierarch that these years of retirement will be a blessing to me, as they will allow me more time to "converse with God" - more time for prayer and reflection. Be sure that you will be in those prayers.

And, as I enter now this time of special blessing, time to walk more quietly in the Lord's presence, I wish to encourage all of you to work with ever greater diligence and commitment for the sake of unity among the Orthodox who sojourn here in North America. I further encourage you to work to maintain a loving and peaceful unity among yourselves. And so, I exhort you in the words of Saint Paul: "I...beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord; one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all." (Ephesians 4:1-6).

Thank you and God bless you.