

# **Sermon for the Ordination to Christ's Holy Priesthood of**

**Fr. Gregory White**

**Preached by His Grace, The Right Reverend Michael,  
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Rector of St. Tikhon's Seminary**

**St. Tikhon's Monastery Church**

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Glory to Jesus Christ!

Perhaps the greatest joy in the life of a bishop is to ordain to Christ's Holy Priesthood one of his sons, one of his students, to afford him the privilege, the opportunity, the incomparable experience of serving the Lord God as a priest, to be able to be the minister of the great Mysteries given to us by our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ: to baptize and to confirm persons as members of the Holy Church; to nourish them with the Bread of Life, the fountain of immortality, through administering the Holy Eucharist in the Divine Liturgy; to hear their confessions, and to pronounce the words of forgiveness and absolution in the Name of the Lord Who died for those sins; to unite a man and a woman in love in the Mystery of Holy Matrimony; to anoint with holy oil the sick for the healing of soul and body; to preach the Word, and teach the Tradition; to counsel those in need; to pray for those who have no one to pray for them – to do all of those things that made St. Kosmas Aitolos say, “If I were walking down the road, and I saw coming towards me on one side a king, and on the other side a priest, I would reverence the priest first, because he has the authority to take bread and wine, and transform it into the Body and Blood of our Savior Jesus Christ. And I'll tell you this: if I were walking down the road, and on one side I saw an angel, and on the other side a priest, I would reverence the priest first, because he has the authority to bind and to loose the sins of men.”

So it is a great joy, a great privilege, for a bishop to stand at the altar with a son who is now a priest, and to know that the Church will continue on, long after that bishop has gone to his rest in eternity.

It is a great thing to be a priest, for everything comes through the priesthood. And the priesthood is not just the greatest calling in all the world, in the words of St. Nikolai of Zicha; it is also the greatest responsibility, because each priest holds in his hands the souls of all the members of his flock. He has to teach them the correct way, and guide them in the way of Truth and Light and Life, and love them into the Kingdom. And sometimes he has to discipline them along the way, in a balanced way, with patience, never losing sight of the love of God in Christ Jesus.

Today, more than ever in recent times, priests are sent out into a world that is ever more secular, where it is easier to sin than to be virtuous, where people choose to love bread and circuses more than the Word of God. Nonetheless we send them out, to do the work of the One Who established His Church, Who established the holy priesthood. Chrysostom tells us that even though the work of the priesthood is done on earth, it is of heavenly origin, for it was not established by a man, or an angel, or an archangel, or any created being, but by God Himself, Who today has filled one young man with the grace of the holy priesthood.

All of you here are part of his life, his formation, his preparation for the priesthood, whether you are part of his family, or his spiritual family in Elmira, or his spiritual family in Williamsport, or his family here at St. Tikhon's, or wherever you are from. You have been drawn here today by the same Lord Who has called him to His priesthood, to serve Him as a priest every day for the rest of his life.

As you share in this great joy, pray for the Lord to strengthen him in bearing this great responsibility. Pray that the Lord would guide his every step in the altar, his every word of teaching and preaching and guiding his flock. Pray that his bishop will be there for him, correcting him, advising him lovingly, helping him when he needs help.

But in those times when maybe that bishop is traveling in Europe, or giving a retreat in another state, or teaching classes all day at the Seminary, and Fr. Gregory has to make a decision on his own, may he remember what the bishop has to remember, the formula given to us in the service for the consecration of a bishop – since every priest represents his bishop, these words apply to the priest as well. It is a simple formula: “whatever the Holy Fathers have, accepted, I accept; and whatever the Holy Fathers have rejected, I reject.”

No bishop ever “rightly defines” the word of Truth – that is a mistranslation. The word of Truth has already been *defined*; it has been given to us by revelation. The bishop only “divides” it – explains it – for brilliant seminary students, and for blossoming young theologians five years old.

We do not have the right to trample on the Tradition, or to broaden the boundaries of moral teachings, or to add by our own reasoning something new and different from the Fathers' teaching, as we see on the horizon around us. We must love and faithfully serve the Church our Lord established *as He established Her*; our job is to transmit the Tradition as our Lord has given it to us.

We are not caretakers of a reliquary; we are vessels of light. We are privileged to be instruments of the grace of God which has continued from the Day of Pentecost, and will continue to the end of the time of this world. We are to be faithful to the Truth that has been given to us, “the Faith delivered to the Saints, once and for all” [St. Jude 3].

So, on this day of joy for a bishop, on this day of the making of a new priest, let us pray that he, a vessel of clay, may be *an instrument of grace* in the priestly service of the Most High God.

Today we honor not the person, but the priest he now is. For as Chrysostom says, when you honor a priest, you honor the priesthood, and when you honor the priesthood, you honor Christ Himself.

So let us honor this new priest – along with his helpmate, his beloved Matushka – for as we honor him whom the Lord has called to be a priest, we honor the priesthood; and in honoring the priesthood, we honor Christ Himself, the Great High Priest. To Him be honor and glory, now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen.

Glory to Jesus Christ!

*His Grace then added the following:*

*“As a priest, you are an extension of the Bishop, standing in his place before the local community. In this way you are a true blessing to the Bishop and by this you faithfully continue to bless him. It is then only appropriate that your first blessing as a priest be to your Bishop.”*

*Removing his miter, His Grace then knelt before the new priest and asked for his blessing. The newly ordained Priest Gregory, surprised and humbled by the request, placed his stole over the head of the Bishop and blessed him in the name of the Holy Trinity.*