

ABBOT ADRIAN'S ADDRESS AT THE BANQUET FOLLOWING THE GLORIFICATION OF ST. PHILARET OF
NEW YORK
MAY 7/20, 2001

"First Orthodoxy! First God's Holy Church!"

ONE

Most Beloved Hierarchs, brother clergy, monastic strugglers, and brothers and sisters who are numbered among the Faithful:

In this season of Paschal joy, we have together, at yesterday's vigil and today's Divine Liturgy, proclaimed that the sacred Hierarch, our Spiritual Father, the truly blessed Metropolitan Philaret, be numbered among the Saints. It is an affirmation - a recognition if you will - on our part, of something outside our worldly sphere that already in fact exists. "Why seek ye the living among the dead. Why mourn ye the incorruptible amid corruption?" We know that these words have been written concerning our Holy Saviour Jesus Christ. As Orthodox Christians we also know that truly Orthodox Hierarchs are the living icons of Christ and so there is an apt application of these phrases of St John Damascene to those who have not only put on Christ but as the possessors of the fullness of grace have defined Christ's sacred image and likeness in themselves. Such was our beloved Hierarch and Father, St. Philaret, in his words, his deeds, his actions, and in his thoughts.

For 21 years, I lived with Metropolitan Philaret. It was he who initially sought that I be received properly into Orthodoxy from Roman Catholicism, through Holy Baptism and even wrote in defense of that stand to others who although knowing better chose to ignore, if not to disdain the Metropolitan's stand. It was he who requested I come to live at the Synodal headquarters, where I was baptized, and it was he who later tonsured me, giving me as a gift the very hand cross with which he himself had been tonsured. And yet later still, he it was who ordained me successively to both the diaconate and then the priesthood and later toward the end of his earthly sojourn raised me to the dignity of Abbot. There are certainly among us today many, especially among the clergy, that had contact with Metropolitan St. Philaret, and all, I am sure, who did, have come away from that encounter edified by his wisdom and depth. For he was a man whose whole being was focused on living Orthodoxy - the unique, salvific and grace-filled organism that is the Body of Christ. Many of you have undoubtedly read Metropolitan Philaret's biography - which we have been listening to during this celebratory meal. From that biography even those that have never had the occasion to meet or see St. Philaret can understand that he was a man of great courage, who despite trends, simply did not succumb to what I have always referred to as the unfortunate affliction (so endemic among the mainstream) of an inferiority complex of being genuinely Orthodox -- of the fear of willingly giving living witness to the righteousness and holiness that Christ's Church alone possesses. Metropolitan St. Philaret was not one who sought worldly acclaim but was one of whom the Psalmist writes, "Chose rather to be an outcast in the house of God than to dwell in the tents of sinners."

As a young hierodeacon, living at the Synodal Cathedral, I worked with the administration, as the secretary of Bishop Gregory (Grabbe). I must tell you, the unique relationship shared between St. Philaret and Bishop Gregory guided the ark of Orthodoxy safely between many threatening and great temptations and obstacles, not the least of which were instigated by some fellow hierarchs, who were obviously not of like mind with them. This was evident to me from the very outset. Remember please that both St. Philaret and Bishop Gregory shared the same Spiritual Father and Confessor, who was the holy elder Archbishop Andrew of Novo Diveyevo Convent - a scion of Optina Hermitage's great wealth of Orthodox Spirituality and who was the unofficial "Godfather," so to speak, of Holy Transfiguration Monastery. These three hierarchs, St. Philaret, Archbishop Andrew and Bishop Gregory shared amongst themselves a genuine reflection of the mind of the Church. But I am not standing here before you today to tell you what I think of St. Philaret or of his role in our time but to share with you some reminiscences. I sought this privilege to speak to you because I was sure that you would like to hear what it was like to live with St Philaret.

As I have said earlier, I lived with Metropolitan Philaret at the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Sign in New York City for 21 years - all of the years that he was Metropolitan except for the first. The very first thing I noticed about Metropolitan Philaret was the holy quiet that seemed to emanate from him. At church services, whether he served or not his eyes were almost always closed and his head bent forward - not to be distracted in any way from his inner prayer. This was also due to an almost innate humility which pervaded every gesture of his. He was generous with his time for others, listening to complaints or appeals with utmost patience and compassion. His charity knew no bounds. Whatever he received he unhesitatingly gave away - whether it were money or even rare artifacts.

He always attended the daily services at the Cathedral and stood in the middle of the church on his monastic style stasidia - not some elaborate episcopal throne. He never spoke unnecessarily in the church during church services. If something or someone could not wait, he would step outside the confines of the church to address the matter. He constantly focused his whole being on the ensuing services - just as if, and he surely did, stand in the very presence of God Himself. When it came time at Matins to read the initial Six Psalms, he would relish the reading of them himself. He would read them with such compunction as to stir the soul, and although he held the book with the printed text in front of him, he never glanced at it really, having his eyes closed and his head inclined forward. Then there were other times that he would stand in the center of the church to perform some service that would be expected of a reader. He particularly loved to read the canons especially at Great Compline and Matins during Holy Week - when he himself would sing the exapostilarion. The Metropolitan did not have a sweet voice but he possessed a sonorous baritone that generated compunction.

He, of course, was a trained musician - he had studied the piano in his youth. He told me, though, that since being ordained and tonsured he no longer played any secular music. He played the piano only to compose his liturgical compositions, of which many remain extant. Those compositions were usually sung by the cathedral choir on his nameday.

I remember that every Saturday before the Triumph of Orthodoxy - shortly before or after the vigil - he would gather all the Cathedral clergy in the synodal hall where there was a grand piano - where he would sit himself upon the piano bench, with us all around the piano to practice the melody of the Anathema that the clergy were to sing on the next day at the service of the Triumph of Orthodoxy. This he did, not to insure our pitches would be right, as some probably thought - but he wished to show by his own example, with what conviction and courage one ought to defend and maintain Orthodoxy. When he presided over this service the following day, he was a living paradigm of what an Orthodox Hierarch should be - compassionate but definite. His use of our time at these "rehearsals" was an affirmation of Orthodox theology - it was never a negative experience. It was because of his selfless involvement as an Orthodox Hierarch that he gained the criticism of many, recalling the words of our Saviour "If they hated Me, they will also hate you." His courage never waned. "First Orthodoxy! First God's Holy Church!"

TWO

One day during Holy Week - I can't remember exactly the year - Bishop Gregory received a very disturbing telephone call from the Federal Bureau of Investigation. There was, they said, to be an attempt on the life of the Metropolitan. The agents of the FBI pleaded that the Metropolitan not take part in the scheduled procession on Holy and Great Friday Matins. The procession route would take us out the front door of the Synod building and up the long staircase in the Cathedral courtyard. Metropolitan thanked everyone for their concern but would not change his plans to participate in the procession no matter what threat. As we progressed down the stairs and then outside all of us clergy were prepared to deflect injury from the Metropolitan with our own lives if need be. We were surrounded by four FBI agents who insisted on accompanying the procession (two on either side of the Metropolitan - outside the clergy and the epitaphios). As conspicuous as they were they tried to blend into the crowd. As I gazed overhead, on the roofs of surrounding buildings stood police in anticipation of a potential incident and to ensure that there was no one there. Needless to say, nothing occurred, by the grace of God, but the perceived threat was palpable and Metropolitan St. Philaret demonstrated to all his unflinching courage - which history has recorded he had done consistently before and after that particular incident.

Certainly St. Philaret's staunch anti-Ecumenical stance as well as his immovable position regarding the Moscow Patriarchate put many to shame and on the defensive, provoking enemies, putting me in mind of St. John Chrysostom's commentary on Matthew 7:24. In speaking about the Apostles, he says: "[F]or when the waves of the whole world were beating against them, when both nations and princes; their own people and strangers; the evil spirits and the devil - and every engine was set in motion, they stood firmer than a rock and dispersed it all."

On another occasion, after Metropolitan St. Philaret's departure and extended stay on the West Coast, at Bishop Gregory's request I commenced an all-out and much overdo cleaning of St. Philaret's reception room where of course he received visitors, dignitaries, etc. The reception room was a responsibility we had since Bishop Gregory and I had raised the necessary funds to renovate this room and I myself had done a great deal of the renovation. While cleaning this room I lifted the dusty cover off of the anoloi in the icon corner to clean the shelves underneath. On the bottom shelf way in the back there was a strange looking apparatus - a round object - about the size of a ping-pong ball made of metal with a portion covered by metal screening. I had my suspicions, so I immediately informed the administration, who in turn brought someone with expertise enough, someone who worked for a governmental agency to determine what the object

was. It was certainly no mystery to this gentleman who immediately took us out of the room and identified it as a sophisticated listening device - able to pick up discussions in the room and to broadcast them within a twelve mile radius. Mind you both the Moscow Patriarchate and the Soviet consul were just blocks away for starters. This gentleman quietly took this device and properly disposed of it. Mind you, as I said, this is the very room where Metropolitan met with petitioners, counseled those seeking his wisdom; where he officially received dignitaries and where he even sometimes heard confessions. You see then, yourself, to what extent certain powers would go to undermine or sabotage the Blessed Metropolitan's important work.

Metropolitan Philaret was renowned for, among other things, his sermons. Not only were they notable for their wise and spiritual content but also for their eloquent construction, as can well be attested to by the recent release of an entire collection of his tape-recorded sermons. And how we were blessed that St. Philaret often preached for not only did he preach at the Divine Liturgy but he almost always preached at every vigil and at nearly every Akathist before the Holy Icon of the "Virgin of Kursk" which was held every Wednesday evening. The Metropolitan himself, you will remember, was born in Kursk. There rolled from his blessed lips a well-spring of righteous wisdom which emanated from his own devout, pious and godly life. He had a phenomenal memory encompassing all that he had read including the Old and New Testaments - and the divinely blessed Holy Fathers from ancient times down to our own contemporaneous times. He often in his sermons quoted his beloved Metropolitan Anthony Khrapovitsky, who was himself a great ascetic. Whatever services Vladyka may have missed, outside of the Divine Liturgy, he read in his rooms. Vladyka St. Philaret was a very modest man in his demeanor and toward others. I remember an occasion where some enthusiastic clergyman had made a luxurious white ryassa for Vladyka (in Russia the married clergy and sometimes hierarchs, would wear a colored ryassa). Metropolitan wore it once only - and that because he felt pressured to do so. As soon as he reached his rooms, being visibly embarrassed, he tossed it off and never again wore it out of monastic modesty.

He was very dogmatic though about the services and personally corrected any mistakes that were made - even to (on rare occasions) coming to the kleros and taking the service book to change an incorrect word in his own hand.

He was also very frugal about the quantity of food he ate - not to mention the rare quarter of a small glass - never finished - of wine - on great and festal occasions.

Despite this severe image, Vladyka almost always displayed an easy wit and humor when he thought the occasion merited it. I remember censuring the church one early morning before Divine Liturgy at the hours. As I passed by his monastic stasidia where he stood - he stepped down and with an extremely serious face and tone he confided, "Fr. Adrian, I have some bad news for you, I'm afraid you've grown a tail," as he pointed to the ground behind me. To my shock, in my fatigue I had not noticed that my monastic belt had come undone and fallen from underneath my priestly vestments onto the floor and indeed it was dragging like a tail behind me.

I am sure that some of you would be interested in knowing that Vladyka Philaret was quite an excellent chess player. As a matter of fact, when he'd go in the summer to the Convent at Lesna, he and the abbess, Mother Magdalene (who was Bishop Gregory's sister by blood) would on occasion play chess, both of them being excellent players.

It was at prayer though and at the Divine Services while standing with Vladyka, especially around the Altar table, that you saw just how intense his prayer was. Never have I seen such unadulterated, concentrated and simple faith as when Vladyka St. Philaret prayed during the Epiclesis and gracefully lifted his sacred right hand in blessing over the Holy Gifts set before us. It was simple but awe-inspiring.

Although Bishop Gregory was, under normal circumstances, my confessor and spiritual father, on occasions when he had to be away for extended periods I would go to confession with the Metropolitan. Standing near him before the ananoi with the Cross and Holy Gospel in his kellia, he would say all the pre-confession prayers from memory and in a most compunctionate manner. He was a compassionate confessor who listened attentively without interruption and then in a most humble way, this great spiritual physician, would seek to bring the soul consolation and peace without himself ever becoming judgmental. Of course, he readily quoted from the fathers and the lives of the Saints. So humble was he that on one occasion he suggested I go to speak to his spiritual father, Archbishop Andrew. Not that he himself was incapable of rendering help but because he thought that Vladyka Andrew's special grace-filled gifts could add dimension to this particular situation.

During a holiday service, I believe it was the Annunciation, one of Vladyka St. Philaret's most beloved holidays, a very frightening and unpleasant event took place. As Vladyka stood during the Divine Liturgy praying intently before the Altar

table with the Royal Doors opened - all of a sudden before we could tell what was going on, a madman, inspired undoubtedly by the evil one, ran from the center of the church through the Royal Doors and picked up the fragile Metropolitan and hurled him across the Altar. Had it been any one else other than the Metropolitan they would have been beside themselves with fear and anger - which I assure you the rest of us were who were present. While subduing the man - which took the strength of most of us clergy present in the Altar - others helped Vladyka to his feet. Amazingly no harm had come to Vladyka. After reassuring us that he had suffered no bodily harm, with his usual strength of character he resumed the service as if nothing of any consequence had happened. But remember that he was already aged and infirm. Such was the strength of St. Philaret's inner peace and prayer.

THREE

Shortly after the publication of St. Philaret's Sorrowful Epistle, which had been translated into several languages, along with his letters to Athenagoras of Thyatira and Archbishop Iakovos, I traveled abroad to both Greece and the Holy Land. It was not unusual to find Metropolitan Philaret's photograph hanging in monasteries at that time on the Holy Mountain of Athos. While in Greece I had the distinct honor of meeting for the first time, His Eminence, Archbishop Auxentios, who kindly and generously extended the offer to personally show me some of the Holy sites and monastic communities not too distant from the Athens area. It was only then really and in the Holy Land as well, that I eventually realized just to what extent Vladyka Philaret was esteemed.

There was an especially moving occurrence that took place visiting the Convent of the Holy Dormition at Parthena, outside of Athens, where the recently reposed and blessed Abbess Euthymia shepherded the many nuns that lived there at that time. With the presence of Archbishop Auxentios she had the monastic flock summoned to the Catholicon. The Archbishop explained that I was his guest and that I was a hierodeacon of Metropolitan Philaret. This blessed woman with tears streaming down her face lifted up her voice and cried: "Ah, Philaret, the Metropolitan, he who is the champion of Orthodoxy." She then had each of the 100 or so nuns come and make a prostration before a rather embarrassed and humbled hierodeacon and asked me to take this lovely bouquet of prayerful love and respect back to Metropolitan Philaret. This account was read by Bishop Gregory at a Synod meeting and was included in its minutes.

Not everyone however esteemed Metropolitan St. Philaret with such deference. Some fellow-hierarchs of the Synod were initially quiet when taken aback by Metropolitan Philaret's daring stand. That however did not last long. Feeling out the possible reaction of the faithful, some of the hierarchs themselves reacted less cautiously and as we see over time especially since the repose of St. Philaret have altogether lost their sense of Orthodox propriety. His Grace, Bishop Gregory stated in his now well-known letter to Metropolitan Vitaly, "They may have disliked us but at least they respected us," alluding to Metropolitan's lonely stand against the tide of ecumenism and syncretism. Remark, if you will, that since the repose of these two exceptional Hierarchs, the rapid decline from every point of view continues to gather even more momentum. It was Metropolitan Vitaly himself - he who was at one time in complete harmony with the Orthodox ecclesiology of St. Philaret and the holy fathers - who shouted at Bishop Gregory's exhaustive efforts to maintain ecclesiological integrity at the last Sobor of Bishops that he (Bishop Gregory) was physically able to attend, "now is not the time for the canons."

All of us should beware, for the enlightened can fall just as easily as anyone else, perhaps ever more so. Even this perspective demonstrates for us the grace-filled influence that Metropolitan Philaret had on some of his fellow Hierarchs. Certainly the greatest cross for Metropolitan Philaret to bear had to have been the lukewarm reception, if not the outright antipathy and hostility expressed on the part of his brother hierarchs. None of us should however be so surprised by this as to forget that at the Council of Florence St. Mark of Ephesus stood basically alone.

Metropolitan Philaret in his difficult position as President of the Synod of bishops tenaciously clinging to the Orthodox stand of his two Predecessors Metropolitan Anthony (Khrapovitsky) and Metropolitan Anastasy (Gribanovsky), sought, through whatever means were available to him, through God's grace to raise to the rank of the episcopacy those who were of like Orthodox mind to balance out the scales if you will, even just a little, just as some of his saintly fellow hierarchs throughout the ages have seen the necessity also to do. So it was, that when Matushka Varvara Maximovna, the late wife of Protopresbyter George Grabbe, reposed, the Metropolitan sought his elevation to the episcopacy. The same thing happened with Archbishop Andrew of Novo-Diveyevo Convent, who was also elevated to the episcopacy after the repose of his late wife. The former, becoming Bishop Gregory, was opposed by many members of the Synod, not excluding the present Metropolitan, and the latter, Archbishop Andrew, was old and quite infirm. (After all, he rarely if ever was able to attend any of the regular meetings of the Synod.) But Metropolitan St. Philaret knew that they were allies. Then there was Archbishop Nathaniel of Vienna, who had lapsed in a personal matter but was restored to the episcopacy due to

Metropolitan Philaret's enormous efforts. In that instance, the same group who opposed St. Philaret's choices before, fought him vigorously in this choice as well. We live in a time, however, when such economia at the hands of such a grace-filled hierarch is justifiably necessary. St. Philaret's sole concern was the Orthodox integrity of the Synod of which he was the presiding member. Every genuinely Orthodox voice, moreover, a hierarchical voice, made the greater difference.

Then there is the matter of which most people are completely ignorant - even to this day. The Metropolitan also clearly saw Holy Transfiguration Monastery as an ally in the encroaching battle for Orthodox truth. He loved the monastery and the convent dearly. He had enormous respect for Fr. Panteleimon, the elder of Holy Transfiguration Monastery, and associates. I remember that it took some time for Metropolitan to convince Fr. Panteleimon to become an Archimandrite. The real struggle came when Metropolitan St. Philaret pleaded, on at least two occasions, with Fr. Panteleimon to become a bishop. Fr. Panteleimon vehemently declined for he knew his detractors would have a field day - "Aha" they would say, "that's why you went to the Russian Synod"; not to mention the resistance that he would have met with on the part of those who had already given St. Philaret grief about his other episcopal candidates. Of course, St. Philaret was grieved by Fr. Panteleimon's decision but it far from diminished his love for Holy Transfiguration Monastery and the fathers there as well as the mothers and sisters at Holy Nativity Convent. He often remarked how he felt more welcomed and at ease at Holy Transfiguration Monastery than, say, in the main Russian Monastery where, when he did go, he was either besieged with unbridled criticism or verbally abused. And to say the truth, as a monastic, he appreciated the more consistent idea of every monk attending all of the church services. He counted on the prayers of the beloved monastic flock of Holy Transfiguration Monastery and Holy Nativity Convent for him personally, as well as for the general well-being of the Holy Orthodox Church.

These, dear friends, are just some reminiscences which can hardly paint a complete picture of such as was our beloved Hierarch and True Shepherd, St. Philaret. Sharing them with you on this day of his glorification may bring you an added perspective to the uniqueness of the man.

Just one more thing though. Recently someone who ought to know better, but guided by other than the best of intentions, has published on the Internet that Metropolitan Philaret was simply putty in the hands of Bishop Gregory and that he in turn had his own agenda. Obviously, to someone who knew them both quite well, nothing could be further from the truth. That by the grace of God they complemented one another is more accurate. All of us are given talents and in their case what one lacked the other seemed to have. Metropolitan St. Philaret was not an administrator and most certainly Bishop Gregory was, for example. The grace-filled manner in which Metropolitan St. Philaret served, preached, taught, extolled, shepherded, confessed, showed compassion, struggled and championed Orthodoxy is the man himself. A person who has been consciously blind to the impact that Vladyka St. Philaret has had is indeed a person to be pitied.

St. John Chrysostom, whom St. Philaret quoted often in his sermons, writes in commentary on the text about the Good Shepherd found in St. John the Evangelist and Theologian: "It is a grave thing indeed to have the care of a church. It is a task that needs a measure of love and courage as great as that of which Christ spoke so that a man may lay down his life for his flock, may never abandon them and may boldly face the wolf. It is in this the shepherd differs from the hireling. For the latter, indifferent to the sheep, is ever watchful of his own safety while the former regardless of his own safety seeks that of his sheep."

When was it that Metropolitan, our beloved Vladyka and St. Philaret, was ever not concerned about his God-given flock?! Yet even now, dear esteemed shepherds and beloved rational flock, he remains concerned and hears our petitions and lovingly intercedes on our behalf. Christ is Risen!

THE END