



THE MANTLE OF ELIJAH

A PASTORAL ENCYCLICAL OF HIS EMINENCE METROPOLITAN ANTHONY
December 22, 2004

To the Reverend Clergy, Monastics, Archons, Archdiocese and Metropolis Council Members, Parish Councils, Philoptochos Societies, Ministries, Choirs, Youth Organizations, and All the Faithful of the Metropolis of San Francisco:

When they had crossed the River Jordan, Elijah said to Elisha, "Tell me what I may do for you, before I am taken from you." Elisha said, "Please let me inherit a double portion of your spirit." He responded, "You have asked a hard thing; yet, if you see me as I am being taken from you, it will be granted you; if not, it will not." As they continued walking and talking, a chariot of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them, and Elijah ascended in a whirlwind into heaven. Elisha kept watching and crying out, "Father, father! The chariots of Israel and its horsemen!" But when he could no longer see him, he grasped his own clothes and tore them in two pieces.

He picked up the mantle of Elijah that had fallen from him, and went back and stood on the bank of the Jordan. He took the mantle of Elijah that had fallen from him, and struck the water, saying, "Where is the Lord, the God of Elijah?" When he had struck the water, the water was parted to the one side and to the other, and Elisha went over.

I Kings 2:8-14

My Dearly Beloved Children in the Lord,

As your bishop for more than 25 years, I am writing to you this final encyclical of my ministry, not knowing how much longer the Lord may grant me to remain upon this earth. For some time now, I have desired to prepare my apologia, an accounting of my ministry and service to the Church, an attempt to define the trajectory which I together with many others have sought to establish, in order that those who come after may have a clear understanding of what we set out to accomplish. Whether I succeeded in the tasks I was given, I do not know; God knows. But at the very least, it seems fitting to describe these tasks as I saw them, so that others may have some criteria by which to judge my humble efforts in the future.

Recently, the account of Elijah's ascent into heaven has come frequently to my mind, and without the usual constraints of my hectic schedule, I have had time to contemplate the meaning of this story, at once mysterious yet familiar. It is a story about departure, and about what is left behind when we are gone. The mantle of Elijah was all that remained after he ascended from this earth. The mantle represents his ministry, his prophetic witness, the cumulative effect of his service in Israel. It represents the "double portion" of his spirit for which Elisha so earnestly yearned, the continuation and extension of his presence among the people. In a sense, this encyclical is my attempt to identify the mantle that I am leaving behind, in the hopes that my spiritual children will take up this mantle, not only carrying on the work that I have begun, but expanding and amplifying it, thus proving themselves true recipients of a "double portion" of my spirit and vision.

THE WORD MADE FLESH

And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us... John 1:14

Since the very beginning of my ministry, I have never been content to allow theology to remain at the level of the abstract "word," of ideas and propositions requiring merely mental acquiescence. Perhaps this

is a vestige of my humble beginnings among simple people, for whom God was not an intellectual or philosophical construct, but a reality ever-present in the rhythm of seedtime and harvest, in the changing of the seasons, in birth and death. True theology must be enfleshed, must become incarnate in time and space, in order to remain faithful to its ultimate task. As my compatriot Nikos Kazantzakis has written, "Within me, even the most metaphysical problem takes on a warm physical body which smells of sea, soil, and human sweat. The Word, in order to touch me, must become flesh. Only then do I understand: when I can smell, see, and touch." It is for this reason that I have always insisted on an incarnational way of doing theology that reflects this constant movement from "word" to "flesh," from the abstract to the concrete, from the intangible to the human touch.

I have been known at times to be impatient with visionaries and idealists. When people come to me and want to share their ideas, I have often said, "Show me your good ideas by putting them into action." Yet this is really not so different from the words of St. Iakovos, "I will show you my faith by what I do" (Jas. 2:18), or for that matter St. Maximos the Confessor, who writes, "Spiritual knowledge not put into practice does not differ in any way from illusion, lacking such practice to give it real substance." Our faith is incarnated and acquires real substance in programs that elevate and inspire our people, in ministries that carry on the work of the Church, in concrete actions that demonstrate our love for others and our commitment to carrying out the work of the Gospel. For in the final analysis, it is not our words, but our deeds that constitute the ultimate criterion of our faith, as Christ Himself taught us: "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, lord,' will enter the Kingdom of Heaven, but only those who do the will of my Father" (Matt. 7:21).

A great deal of my ministry has been identified with building and construction projects. For over 25 years I have been the "building bishop," constantly urging our communities to acquire land, to develop plans, to break ground and to build. Since I came to this Metropolis in 1979, we have constructed and consecrated no less than 25 new churches, essentially one new church every year, and nearly every community has taken on some major building or renovation project during my tenure. The soaring lines of a Byzantine church are a mode of expression of the theology of the Church, as are the simpler elements of a well-designed parish hall or a well-furnished kitchen (where I am often to be found before a meal is served, stirring and sampling and making suggestions). All are places of *philoxenia*, sacred spaces where the hospitality by which God becomes present in our midst is offered, as the icon of the "Hospitality of Abraham" reminds us.

TREASURES NEW AND OLD

Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old. Matt. 13:52

When I was enthroned as the Bishop of San Francisco on June 7, 1979, I stated in my enthronement speech, "The challenge of serving our Holy Church in the western United States awakens in me the call of the frontier, where development and expansion are possible, where the human resources are limitless, and where spiritual and intellectual growth are not only possible, but attainable." From the very beginning, I have felt my episcopal ministry to be a calling to stand at the

frontier of faith, refusing to retreat into the well-trodden paths of religious convention and formalism. In a certain sense, one might be so bold as to say that I and this Metropolis were made for each other, since we both share this “spirit of the frontier.” My service to the Church has been defined by a progressive contour, a willingness to encounter the surrounding culture with the same creativity and flexibility demonstrated by the great Fathers of the Church, while at the same time holding fast to what is essential and irreducible in our theological tradition.

I can think of no better image of this aspect of my ministry, no better illustration of this attempt to bring together the old and the new, than the Katholikon, the magnificent church edifice of the Monastery of the Theotokos the Life-Giving Spring. Anyone with even the most basic understanding of Byzantine architecture will immediately recognize the proportions and symmetry of the Byzantine heritage, the classical lineaments of the so-called “churches of Mystras.” Yet upon entering, one is immediately struck by the fact that this sacred space is not defined solely in terms of bygone history. The icons, especially the breathtaking iconography of the central dome, offer a fresh vision of the meaning and scope of Christ’s salvation, representing an approach that is at once firmly rooted in tradition yet not slavishly devoted to reproducing the past. Our task is not merely to imitate what was done by the saints of previous eras, but somehow to appropriate at a much deeper level the way in which they engaged their own historical environment, seeking to respond as they would have responded had they lived in our day.

For over 25 years, the Metropolis of San Francisco has stood at the frontier of faith, the threshold between the old and the new, with a pioneering spirit that does not shy from controversy or confrontation. We have been among the most progressive in the Archdiocese in the use of the English language in our parishes, while at the same time holding fast to the Hellenic heritage and identity through programs such as the Metropolis Folk Dance and Choral Festival. We have led the way in Church music with beautiful new compositions and boldly innovative approaches, without losing the ethos, the inward essence of our rich musical legacy. We have been among the most engaged in terms of ecumenical and interfaith dialogue, culminating in the historic “Ecumenical Pilgrimage” to Canterbury, Rome, and Constantinople in 2003, while at the same time firmly retaining the distinctiveness of our Orthodox theological tradition. In short, we have endeavored always to embrace the opportunities inherent in the “new,” without surrendering what is of enduring value in the “old.” As Solomon the wise remarks, we must “take hold of the one, without letting go of the other, for the one who fears God will succeed in both” (Eccl. 7:18).

THE YOUTH AND THE CHRISTIAN FAMILY

Whoever does not receive the Kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it. Luke 18:17

In July of 1979, just a few weeks after my enthronement as Bishop of San Francisco, I traveled to St. Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church in San Jose to baptize the infant son of one of our priests. I am certain that both the clergy and the laypeople who attended were watching carefully for some sign, some indication of what their new bishop was like. At the conclusion of the baptism, I lifted up the child and said, “In this child, and countless others like him, lies the hope and future of our Church. What spiritual inheritance will we leave behind for them and generations to come?” Then, while people were still smiling at me and the child, I said something that seemingly caught them off guard: “By the grace of God, I am looking for someone to give me a million dollars, or its equivalent in property, so that I can build a camp and retreat center where this child can someday go to learn about his Orthodox faith and Hellenic heritage.”

That event in many ways set the tone for my future ministry. For while many undoubtedly left the baptism shaking their heads over the foibles of the new bishop, that announcement soon led to a meeting arranged by Fr. John Bakas between myself and Mr. Nicholas Kossaras, who afterward donated 185 acres of land in the Sequoia-Nevada foothills near Dunlap, California, that became St. Nicholas Ranch Conference and Retreat Center. I was never afraid to ask big, knowing that I was asking not for myself, but for the Church, and especially for the youth and the succeeding generations. St. Nicholas Ranch thus became symbolic, not only of my *παρρησία* or boldness in asking, but also of my abiding commitment to the youth. Over the years, we have expanded not only the physical boundaries of the Ranch by acquiring more property (today almost 300 acres), we have expanded its mission as well. We have attained the original vision of creating a haven for our youth and a spiritual center to host our Metropolis programs and conferences. And we have recently fulfilled a long-cherished dream with the completion and dedication of the magnificent Monastery of the Theotokos the Life-Giving Spring. But I envision much more still to come, a “St. Nicholas Center,” an integrated campus of facilities that will include a Hellenic Heritage Center housing a library with thousands of volumes containing the history of the Greek Orthodox community on the west coast, a museum, and an archival center safeguarding the archives of the Metropolis and all its parishes. One day, this complex may even become the kernel for a theological preparatory school for seminarians studying for the priesthood. It remains for my successors to “take up the mantle” and fulfill this aspect of my life’s work and vision.

In my enthronement speech, I laid out two major priorities that would come to define the heart of my ministry: the youth and the Christian family. St. Nicholas Ranch was one way in which we sought to fulfill this mandate. But there were many other ways. In the early 1980s, we began a series of youth conferences, gathering thousands of young people in places like Anaheim and Santa Clara, and culminating in the great youth rally that was held in conjunction with the Clergy-Laity Congress of 1982. Those events were in many ways what energized the “youth movement” in our Archdiocese at that time. And they also gave momentum to the dozen or so folk dance groups that grew into the annual Folk Dance and Choral Festival, one of the most powerful and far-reaching ministries of our Metropolis. From the time I was a child myself, I have loved to dance, and have always regarded dance as a kind of spiritual activity. As with prayer, it is also through music and dance that we seek to express the deepest yearnings and highest aspirations of the human spirit. To quote Nikos Kazantzakis once more, “Anyone who cannot sing cannot pray. Angels have mouths, but lack the power of speech; they sing to God by dancing.” The Metropolis of San Francisco Folk Dance and Choral Festival has become the largest exhibition of authentic Greek folk dance, costume, and music in the world. Like St. Nicholas Ranch, the Folk Dance Festival was a means to abolishing the “myth of the distance,” gathering not only the youth of our Metropolis, but the Orthodox family as well, a means to bringing people together. In fact, if I had to identify one of the primary achievements of my ministry, it would be this: I have brought people together.

THE FLOWERING OF MONASTICISM

Abba Anthony said, “Let us eat at the ninth hour, and then let us go out for a walk and explore the country.” So they went out into the desert and they walked until sunset. Then Abba Anthony said, “Let us pray and plant the cross here, so that those who wish to build a new monastery may do so here.” From the Sayings of the Desert Fathers

I gravitate to the above story of St. Anthony, my namesake, because it offers us a glimpse of a side of his personality that is not often recognized or appreciated. We are accustomed to associate St. Anthony, the

“Father of Monasticism,” with solitude and silence. But here we see a man with his eyes on the horizon, slightly restless, St. Anthony the explorer, the founder of monasteries. And this makes me identify all the more with my patron saint, knowing him to have been not only a man of prayer, but a man of action.

The great revival of Greek Orthodox monasticism in America may be said to have begun in the Metropolis of San Francisco with the coming of Geronta Ephraim to this Metropolis by my invitation in 1989. At that time, I shared with Fr. Ephraim my vision of a monastic center at St. Nicholas Ranch. For years, ever since the youth of our Metropolis planted the cross on a hilltop overlooking the Ranch (in an action reminiscent of St. Anthony’s), we had prayed for the emergence of a monastic community on the premises, in order to enhance and deepen the spiritual foundations of the Ranch environment and experience. Fr. Ephraim subsequently arranged for the coming of two wonderful nuns from Greece, Sister Markella and Sister Fevronia, in 1993, and thus originated the Monastery of the Theotokos the Life-Giving Spring. From this small beginning, the monastic community has grown to fifteen nuns. In 1995, we broke ground for the *Katholikon*, the monastic church edifice, our “jewel of the mountains.” With its exquisite marble floor, intricate woodcarving, and stunningly beautiful iconography, the *Katholikon* is without a doubt the most breathtaking Greek Orthodox church to be found anywhere in America. In 2000, we began work on the Kellia or monastic residences, and in 2003 we held the Thyranoxia service, dedicating both these magnificent structures to the glory of God, and officially installing Sister Markella as the first Abbess of the Monastery.

The establishment of the Monastery of the Life-Giving Spring was followed within a few years by the founding of St. Anthony Monastery in Florence, Arizona, in 1995, by Abbot Paisios and five other brothers from Mount Athos in Greece. With the explosive growth of its monastic community, which has now grown to over forty monks, and the extraordinarily rapid expansion of its facilities, St. Anthony became the great “miracle in the desert,” the flagship, so to speak, of all the other Greek Orthodox monasteries in America. The Monastery of St. John the Forerunner in Goldendale, Washington, also began in 1995 with a generous donation of property by Dr. Gerald Timmer, and the subsequent coming of Abbess Epraxia, Sister Parthenia, and Sister Agne from Greece. In just a few short years, this monastery has grown to sixteen sisters, becoming one of the largest women’s monastic foundations in the Archdiocese. The monasteries hold fast to traditional practice, thus fulfilling their mandate to be the “conscience of the Church.” And the amazing growth of these monastic communities offers a compelling witness to the tremendous vitality of monasticism in this country.

FRIENDS OF THE POOR

Let us love one another, not in word or speech, but in truth and action.

1 John 3:18

As Orthodox Christians, we recognize the ultimate goal of the Christian life to be theosis or divinization—becoming like God as much as is possible for human beings. Yet this process of *theosis* is not a matter of a discarnate spirituality that retreats from human need and suffering. The journey towards *theosis* is rather expressed through concrete acts of love and mercy in imitation of God, who is love. As St. Gregory the Theologian writes, “Prove yourself a god to the unfortunate, imitating the mercy of God. There is nothing so godly in human beings as to do good works.” And this love in action is epitomized, I believe, by the ministry of our Metropolis Philoptochos Society. When I consider the ministry of Philoptochos, I am reminded of the women who ministered to the body of our Savior after the Crucifixion. Just as these women cared for the wounded and broken body of the Lord, so also the women of Philoptochos are called to minister to the Body of

Christ; that is, the Church. And just as the myrrh-bearing women who came to the tomb were sent forth by the angels to announce the Resurrection of Christ, so also the women of Philoptochos have received a commission to proclaim the Risen Lord, not with mere words, but with tangible actions of love and service that proclaim the Gospel more loudly than words could ever do. To quote St. Francis of Assisi, for whom the seat of our Metropolis is named, we are to “preach the Gospel, and if absolutely necessary, use words.”

Among the greatest accomplishments of our Philoptochos in this regard is the “Kids ‘n’ Cancer/Camp Agape” program. This amazing ministry began at St. Nicholas Ranch, and has expanded to Portland and Seattle, with new programs under development in San Diego and Phoenix. Every year, hundreds of children with cancer, many from disadvantaged homes, have the opportunity together with their families to participate in a summer camp program free of charge, with all expenses paid by Philoptochos. The goal of the program is to provide as normative a camp experience as possible, including games, barbecues, campfires, sing-alongs, and the like. Yet the program is also specifically attuned to the unique physical and emotional needs of these children, as well as providing the parents with support and an opportunity for networking. Another tremendous example of this “love in action” is the “Bishop Anthony Student Aid Endowment Fund,” of which Philoptochos has become the champion and steward. This fund provides scholarships to students from our Metropolis attending Hellenic College or Holy Cross School of Theology. Through the annual Student Aid Endowment Holiday Luncheon, this fund has grown to over one-and-a-half million dollars. When I was a student at the Ecclesiastical School of Chania in Crete, and at the great Theological School of Halki of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, my education was completely underwritten by the Church (except for one unfortunate period when I lost my scholarship because I did not keep my grades up, and had to work to pay my tuition—a lesson I have never forgotten!). It has always been my goal that all students from this Metropolis who are studying for the priesthood or for some other form of full-time service to the Church should have their education similarly paid for by the Church. No one should ever be denied the opportunity to study for the priesthood because of a lack of funds.

Despite all that has been accomplished, however, much more remains to be done. There is an urgent need for our parishes to acquire a heightened sense of responsibility to the local community, ministering to the needs of the hungry and the homeless, the sick and the needy, the lonely and abandoned. Years ago, we had envisioned the creation of a permanent position at the Metropolis level occupied by a trained social worker, who would coordinate parish programs of social ministry and outreach. Unfortunately, our plans did not come to fruition at that time; this initiative remains for others to carry out in the future. I am convinced that the time has come for our churches to take a more integrated and systematic approach to issues of poverty, hunger, and homelessness. The miracle of the Incarnation, of the word become flesh, is extended and perpetuated in us, who through the descent of the Holy Spirit at baptism have become “members of Christ’s body, of His very flesh and bones” (Eph. 5:30). And this constitutes a sacred obligation for us to minister in Christ’s name to our neighbor; that is, to every person in need whom we encounter (cf. Luke 10:25-37).

A SACRED INVITATION

Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.
Matt. 11:28

In July of 2002, the Metropolis of San Francisco hosted the 36th Biennial Clergy-Laity Congress of the Archdiocese, with the theme “Offering our Orthodox Faith to Contemporary America.” The theme of the Congress was particularly appropriate in view of the fact that

our Metropolis has long been at the forefront of missions and evangelism in the Archdiocese. In 1982, the Diocese Philoptochos inaugurated the “Pennies and Prayers” program in order to raise funds for home missions projects, as well as increasing awareness of missions throughout the diocese. Soon afterwards, the “HOME Foundation” was born in Phoenix, Arizona, in 1984. The HOME Foundation was instrumental in the creation of three new “daughter” parishes in the Phoenix metropolitan area without significant diminution of the “mother” church, Holy Trinity Cathedral. This was a model that was to be repeated throughout the Metropolis, in Sacramento, Portland, Seattle, and elsewhere, by the successor to the HOME Foundation, the Committee on Orthodox Missions and Evangelism (COME). COME utilizes surveys, demographic studies, and careful planning to create and sustain viable eucharistic communities in the areas that need them most. Taken together, HOME and COME represent the first systematic approach to church planting in our Archdiocese.

My tenure has witnessed the founding of over twenty new parishes and missions in this Metropolis, many of which have gone on to acquire land and build, establishing themselves as durable fixtures of the ecclesial landscape. These young parishes represent the newness of Orthodoxy in this land, with predominantly English worship, numerous converts, and an abundance of young families with children, often representing the third and fourth generations from the old country. They represent the openness of our Church to embrace its true catholic identity, to become “all things to all people.” But our work in missions has not been limited to activities within our Metropolis. In 1985, we raised seventy-five thousand dollars in aid for starving children in Ethiopia. And in 1992, COME sponsored the “Russia Challenge,” an inter-Orthodox relief effort that sent a team of missionaries together with desperately-needed food, medicine, and other supplies to the Ukraine after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Russia Challenge culminated in the great “Easter Airlift,” in which thousands of boxes of supplies were shipped to Russia. In conjunction with this effort, I traveled to Russia together with an ecumenical delegation, where I had the opportunity to participate in the first truly free celebration of Holy Pascha in Moscow in over 70 years.

In concluding this section on missions, it seems appropriate to emphasize the pressing need for strengthened relations and more effective communication among the canonical Orthodox jurisdictions in America. At present, our many separate and uncoordinated activities not only result in much duplication of effort, but also frequently lead to a diffusion and dispersion of our energies, constituting a principle of spiritual entropy. If Orthodoxy in this country is to succeed in its missionary vocation, if it is truly to realize its catholic identity, then we must work towards a more unified presentation of the Orthodox faith in this land. The mantle that Elijah passed on to Elisha held the power to divide, to “part the waters to the one side and to the other.” But perhaps it may be that the mantle that we bequeath to our successors may become an instrument of union, bringing together that which was once separated like the parted waters, so that they reunite to form a seamless and indivisible whole.

I HAVE LAID A FOUNDATION

By the grace of God given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid a foundation... I Cor. 3:10

In the above-referenced passage, St. Paul writes that by his apostolic ministry among the Corinthians he has laid a firm and immovable foundation of faith and sound doctrine. And yet Paul also clearly recognizes that he did not do so alone, but with the assistance of many others, who by their labors became “fellow-workers” both with God and with himself (cf. I Cor. 3:9). In the same vein, I would be deeply remiss if I did not acknowledge my enormous indebtedness to those

who labored with me to make possible everything that has been previously recounted. My profound appreciation is due to my co-workers and concelebrants, the priests and deacons of this Metropolis, without whom even the best-laid plans would never have come to fruition. I am also deeply grateful to the many laypeople whose assistance has been vital to the realization of these endeavors. I am especially thankful to His Grace Bishop Anthimos for his longstanding friendship and invaluable assistance within the Metropolis. I thank His Eminence Archbishop Demetrios and the former Archbishops of America under whom I have served, as well as my fellow Metropolitans of the Holy Eparchial Synod, for their love and support throughout my ministry. And I offer my sincere respect and deep gratitude to His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, who has wisely overseen the Church in both my native and adopted homelands. Finally, I give thanks to God, who saw fit in my unworthiness to permit me to serve Him, first as a layman, and then as a deacon, a priest, and a bishop. And I echo the words of the Gospel, “When you have done all that is commanded you, say, ‘We are unprofitable servants. We have only done what was our duty’” (Luke 17:10).

As I come to the end of my ministry, I am struck more and more by this fact: that for someone who is passionately engaged in a vocation, someone who is deeply committed to a life’s mission and task, there is never an interval at which to make a clean break, never a good time to make an end. Rather, the end of every endeavor becomes the beginning of a new task. I am reminded of the conclusion of one of Kazantzakis’ works, in which he describes the crucifixion of Christ; at the very end, after Christ has triumphantly cried, “It is finished,” the last line reads, *κι ἦταν σὰ νᾶ λεγε, «ὄλα ἀρχίζου»* —and it was as if to say, “Everything is now beginning.” Every end has within it the seed of a beginning. Elijah’s departure marked the beginning of Elisha’s ministry, the herald of yet greater miraculous events, the opening of a new chapter in the prophetic history of Israel. To truly complete anything is more than we can hope for in this life. All we can do is to lay a foundation, and trust that those who come after will build upon it with the same careful consideration, the same diligent industry, and the same loving purpose. It is not for us to determine what shall be built upon this foundation. That is left to the wisdom of future generations, who will take up the mantle like Elisha, carrying on the task that we have begun in ways that we cannot possibly imagine or foresee.

And now to God ineffable, indescribable, unfathomable abyss of wisdom, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ and the Creator of all things; to God the Only-Begotten Son, the Incarnate, Crucified, and Risen Lord, who has reconciled us in one Body by His Precious Cross; to God the All-Holy, Good, and Life-Giving Spirit, who proceeds from the Father and rests in the Son, Renewer and Sustainer of all things, to the All-Holy Trinity beyond all conception and being, be glory and might and dominion and thanksgiving and honor and worship, now and forever, and to the endless ages. Amen.

With Paternal Love and Blessings,

Metropolitan Anthony

**✠Metropolitan Anthony of
San Francisco**

