

Address delivered by His Grace BASIL

ON THE OCCASION OF HIS ENTHRONEMENT AS BISHOP OF WICHITA AND MID-AMERICA DECEMBER 15, 2004

M beloved Father in God: the Most Reverend Philip, Archbishop of New York and Metropolitan of all North America;
My esteemed Brother in the Lord: the Right Reverend Joseph, Bishop of Los Angeles and the West;

My most cherished Sons in Christ: the Right Reverend, Very Reverend and Reverend Priests and Deacons;

My venerable Intercessors before the All-holy Trinity: the venerable Monastics who struggle here in the Heartland;

My precious Lambs of Christ the Good Shepherd: the faithful, beloved of the Mother of God, who are gathered together from the farthest reaches of our Diocese and Nation;

My Brothers and Sisters: Glory to Jesus Christ!

On the day when I was consecrated to the sacred episcopacy in this very Cathedral, I spoke the following words which were first uttered by our Venerable and God-bearing Father Symeon the New Theologian on the occasion of his election as superior of the Monastery of Saint Mamas in the year 980:

"I feel shame before your charity, because I know my unworthiness. For this reason I would rather be silent forever, as the Lord knows, without even lifting up my eyes to look at any man's face, since my conscience condemns me. I was appointed to be the superior over all of you, though I am wholly unworthy ... Thus it is no small and ordinary grief that possesses me for having been chosen, unworthy as I am, to lead you who are most worthy."

Now, having lived the life of a bishop for twelve and a half years, I know even more my unworthiness for that sacred office. But while my grief at having been elected to the episcopacy remains, it is far outweighed by my thankfulness to our good God who loves mankind, for I have experienced firsthand how He compassionately and patiently tolerates this

sinner and uses him, as He did Balaam's ass, to lead men to the Good News of forgiveness of sins in Christ Jesus and everlasting life in the Kingdom of Heaven.

Now, for reasons known only to Him, He has chosen my unworthiness to bear the title of and responsibility for a newly-established Diocese. Some may think that one person – in this case me, Bishop Basil – is the reason for our gathering this evening. But they would be mistaken. That which we celebrate this evening is something much bigger and of

greater importance than me or any one person. It is much bigger and of greater importance than this Cathedral or any one holy temple, this City of Wichita or any one town, this State of Kansas or any one state. That which is the cause of our great rejoicing and the reason for this festive celebration is the establishment, by the Will of God, of the Diocese of Wichita and Mid-America – a recognition that the πληρωμα, the fullness, of the Church of Christ lives and breathes right here in America's Heartland.

Shortly after his consecration to the sacred episcopacy a century ago – on March 13, 1904 – St. Raphael of Brooklyn performed his first priestly ordination, the ordinand being a young widower, Nicola Yanney, a native of the tiny village of Fi'eh in north Lebanon, living with his children on a farm in Gibbon, Nebraska. Father Nicola was ordained for what was then the westernmost parish of St. Raphael's Diocese, St. George Church in Kearney, Nebraska, but he was given pastoral responsibility for an area that is nearly identical to the boundaries of our newly-created Diocese of Mid-America. Father Nicola's parish stretched from the Canadian border in the north, to the Mexican border in the south, and from the Mississippi River in the east, to the Rocky Mountains in the west. It is Father Nicola who, as a circuit-riding priest headquartered in Kearney, followed the example of his Father-in Christ, St. Raphael, and visited Orthodox Christians in the scattered towns, villages and isolated farm lands throughout America's Heartland.



Could Father Nicola, the sole priest serving a parish as large as the Great Plains, have imagined that the seeds he planted would bear fruit this day as we witness the birth of a Diocese comprised of fifty congregations and served by a Bishop and dozens of priests and deacons? Could any among those immigrants gathered with him at Divine Liturgy in a crowded living room on the west side of Wichita have imagined that exactly one century later there would be in this All-American city (named for a local tribe of Native Americans and which counts among its founders Catherine McCarty, the mother of Billy the Kid) a Diocesan Cathedral? *“Come and see the works of the Lord, how awesome He is in His counsels, more than the sons of men”* (Ps. 65:4). We bless the memory of Father Nicola and his brothers in the sacred priesthood who came after him to minister to Christ’s flock in Mid-America, and we bless the memory of their wives and children and of all the sons and daughters of the Church who first brought Holy Orthodoxy to the Great Plains and witnessed to its Truth by their very lives. God grant that we be found worthy of their sacrifice.

On behalf of their spiritual descendants, all of us gathered in this holy Cathedral from every corner of the Diocese of Wichita and Mid-America, I express to our Most Blessed Patriarch Ignatius IV and the venerable members of the Holy Synod of the See of the Great City of God Antioch and all the East, profound gratitude for discerning in us a level of spiritual maturity warranting self-rule for our beloved Archdiocese of North America.

I make a prostration before our most beloved Father in God, the Most Reverend Metropolitan Philip, kissing his sacred right hand and asking his blessing and God-pleasing prayers for me and for the Christ-loving Priests and Deacons of this Diocese, their families and all the pious faithful who comprise that portion of Christ’s flock now entrusted to my archpastoral care. Your Eminence, the nearly four decades you have lived for us as Father and Chief Shepherd of the Archdiocese of North America can easily be read as pages of a living Gospel adorned with illuminations painted with your own sweat and blood and tears. All which we are today, all which we hope to be tomorrow, is inspired by Your Eminence’s faithfulness to God’s call and your charge to us that we be nothing but the Church, the very Body of Christ her Bridegroom – here (in America), and now (the 21st century), the Church of the Apostles Peter and Paul – here and now, the Church of Saint Thekla Peer-of-the-Apostles – here and now, the Church of Saint Ignatius of Antioch – here and now, the Church of Saint John Chrysostom – here and now, the Church of Saints Pelagia the Penitent, John of Damascus, Raphael of Brooklyn

– here and now. God grant that we be found worthy of Your Eminence’s confidence.

Brothers and sisters of the Diocese of Wichita and Mid-America, a sacred trust has been placed in our hands this evening. Responsibility for proclaiming the Gospel, responsibility for raising up holy souls and holy temples, responsibility for being the Church here in the Heartland has now been entrusted to us. The meaning of our English word “tradition” is for Orthodox Christians found in the Greek word *παράδοσις*, which literally means a “passing down” or a “handing on” of something. What has now been passed down or handed on to us is nothing less than *“the faith which was once delivered unto the saints”* (Jude 3b). But, thanks be to God, we are not alone in fulfilling this awesome responsibility. We are eager to join with our fellow Orthodox Christians of other jurisdictions, who also call these Great Plains “home,” in building up Holy Orthodoxy in the Heartland. May God “knit us together as one man” (Judges 20:11) that we might prove to be faithful and wise stewards of that which He has entrusted to us. *“For unto whosoever much is given, of him shall be much required; and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more”* (Luke 12:48b).

I am most appreciative of the presence this evening of my beloved brother in Christ and concelebrant in the Sacred Mysteries, His Grace Joseph, Bishop of Angeles and the Diocese of the West. Thank you, Sayidna, for the trouble you have taken and for the honor you have accorded us. *Eis polla eti Dhespota!*

I bless my clergy as well as those clergy from other Dioceses who have traveled from near and far to be present for this historic occasion. Fathers, know without a doubt that you are the joy, the consolation and the boast of all bishops of this Archdiocese. May the Lord God remember your priesthood in His kingdom always.

I bless my sisters, my Godchildren, my spiritual children and all the faithful laity present in this holy Cathedral this evening and beg your holy prayers for me and my clergy.

Let historians record that on this day – Wednesday, December 15, 2004 – Christ has adorned His Bride, the Church, with another Diocese for the preservation and propagation of Holy Orthodoxy – the Diocese of Wichita and Mid-America. May we, the clergy and laity of that Diocese, always have the prayers of His all-immaculate Mother, the Most Holy Theotokos and Ever-virgin Mary, and of all the saints who in every generation have been well-pleasing to the God Who is worshipped and glorified in Trinity, now and throughout all ages. Amen.