

ENTHRONEMENT SPEECH BY GERONDA STEPHANOS (September 3, 2026)

Your Eminence, Archbishop Elpidophoros of America
Your Eminence, Metropolitan Savvas of Pittsburgh
Your Grace, Bishop Athenagoras of Nazianzos
Your Grace Bishop Nektarios of Diokleia

Respected Abbots and Abbesses,
Beloved Fathers, pious pilgrims, beloved friends of our Monastery, and above
all, beloved Fathers and Brothers of my brotherhood:

Honestly, I do not know what to say today.

There are times in a person's life when words are incomparably small when
compared to the feelings of the heart. Today is one of those moments.

I stand here feeling not that I have acquired something, but feeling that God has
entrusted me with something that is much greater than my capabilities.

I do not feel that I have become an Abbot. I feel that a cross has been given to
me.

Because I am aware that the Abbacy is not a distinction. It is not an honor. It is
not a dominion. It is a ministry. It is a responsibility before God for souls that do
not belong to us.

Our brothers do not belong to us. They belong to Christ.

Our Monastery does not belong to us. It belongs to Christ.

We are simply the people to whom our Lord has temporarily entrusted
something sacred.

Thus, today I do not want to say that I am "taking charge." I want to say, "Lord
help me."

And to all of you I want to say, "Pray for me."

This is what I am in need of more than any other wish, more than any praise,
more than any human recognition.

Because I know myself. I know my weaknesses.

And I know that without the grace of God I cannot lift even a small part of this burden.

My name is Stephanos.

The more I think about this name, which my holy Elder gave me, the more I feel that today God is reminding me of what it means for someone to minister the Church.

Saint Stephen was the first deacon of the Church and the first Martyr.

He was first to minister. He was also the first to accept the cross of martyrdom.

For me, this is a perpetual precept.

Because true ministry is not a road of comfort.

It passes through the Cross.

Saint Stephen did not serve seeking glory. He served until the end. And when the stones were falling upon him, he did not defend himself. He prayed.

Perhaps this is the greatest prayer I can offer today for myself:

To be worthy of serving without seeking repayment.

To love without seeking to be justified.

To forgive without expecting others to understand me.

And when I am wounded, to be able to say: "Lord, do not take this sin into account."

This is the spirit of the Gospel. This is also the spirit of monasticism.

We did not come here to be justified. We came here to repent.

We did not come here to be served. We came here to serve.

We did not come here to do our own will. We came here to discover the will of God.

Perhaps the essence of the Abbacy is this: To become last, so that others may breathe easy.

To lift the burden first, so that your brother is not crushed.
To bend down, so that someone else can stay standing.

This is what I want to learn. And I am afraid that I still have much to learn. This is why I ask for your help.

This present day contains something even deeper for me, because I am not starting from scratch. I am receiving a spiritual inheritance; a sacred tradition; a responsibility that comes from afar. It comes from Mount Athos. It comes from Saint Joseph the Hesychast. It comes from Elder Ephraim of Philotheou and Arizona. And, finally, it reaches us through our Elder Joseph of blessed memory.

When I bring to mind this chain, I feel very small.

Because monastic tradition is not something that we can contrive. It is something that we receive with the fear of God and transmit responsibly.

Saint Joseph the Hesychast did not leave us a theory. He left us a living example. He left us the prayer. He left us obedience. He left us repentance. He left us love for Christ.

The venerable Elder Ephraim took this flame and, through his inconceivable sacrifice, he transported it to America.

He did not come simply to establish monasteries. He came to transmit the breath of Mount Athos. To transport the prayer. To create places where people living within a noisy world would be able to hear the silence of God once again.

This was neither easy nor simple. It was something very difficult and painful. But this is how it had to be. When Elder Ephraim had first started his missionary work here in America and Canada, he once said the following to some of his spiritual children: "For things to be so difficult and painful, and for the devil to lash out so powerfully, it means that God wants to do something very significant. It seems that the tree that is being planted will grow deep roots, in order to bring forth much fruit. Right now God is laying down a very deep foundation, because He is building something very great and significant. There

is no other explanation.” And indeed, today the monasteries in America and Canada attest to the truth of Elder Ephraim’s words at the time.

Today, the monasteries are the spiritual lungs of the Church.

The Church is not in need of words alone. It has the need to breathe.

And the breath of monasticism is prayer.

When the world is sleeping, here at the monastery someone is keeping vigil.

When the world is hysterically bellowing, someone here at the monastery is whispering: “Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me.”

Perhaps just at that moment, without anyone realizing, the entire world is breathing on account of the prayer of one monk.

In my opinion, this is at the heart of the legacy we have inherited: the prayer, “Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me.”

So few words; and yet, the entire life of a monk fits within them.

The venerable Elder Ephraim taught us with his life that the Jesus Prayer is not simply a prayer that is said with the lips. It is a way of existence. It is the return of the mind to Christ. It is the breath of the soul. It is a rope which man holds on to when everything within him is falling apart.

This is why I want to hold on to it.

When I am happy: “Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me.”

When I am afraid: “Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me.”

When I am wronging others, when I am being wronged, when I do not know what I am doing: “Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me.”

And when the final hour comes: “Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me.”

A monk may lose many things. He may lose his comfort. He may lose human recognition. He may lose things which he once considered indispensable. If, however, he does not lose the name of Christ from his lips and from his heart, he hasn’t lost anything.

Because within the Jesus Prayer, we do not simply have some prayer; we have Christ Himself.

Today I also feel especially grateful on account of the presence of our Hierarchs. Because they are not here today simply to honor an enthronement ceremony. They are here because they love monasticism. They are Hierarchs who have lived in monasteries, who have experienced monastic life, who appreciate the value of hesychasim, obedience, and prayer. This is of tremendous importance to us.

Because monasticism is not only in need of people who respect it, but also in need of people who love and understand it. And today, I feel that God has given us this blessing.

Your Eminences and Graces, I thank you because your presence here today serves as a reminder that the monastery is not outside the Church. It exists within the Church. It is the heart within the body of the Church. And the heart cannot live separated from the body.

Your Eminence, Archbishop Elpidophoros of America: Your presence is most touching for me, because you are not acquainted with the Abbacy only through books, but also from experience. You have served as the Abbot of the Sacred Monastery of the Holy Trinity in Halki. You know, therefore, what it means to have a brotherhood within your heart. You know what the joy of one person and the pain of another means. You know what it means to be a father and a brother simultaneously. To correct without crushing. To love without spoiling. To persist without being insensitive. To lift the burden of the brotherhood silently with prayer.

This is why your blessing today is of special importance for me. Not only because it comes from my own Hierarchy, but also from a person who has occupied the seat that I am called to fill today.

I thank you Your Eminence, for your love, with which you have enveloped our Monastery. I thank you for your paternal care and your discerning presence. Because a monastery is in need of its shepherd. It needs his blessing. It needs his protection. But it also needs his trust. And I consider your trust a huge blessing.

I, thus, assure you that I want this Monastery to always live within the canonical order of the Church, with obedience, sincerity, and trust toward its shepherd. This is what the holy fathers taught us.

Obedience is not a restrictive chain; it is freedom. And the ecclesiastical order does not restrict a monastery; it protects it.

Your Eminence Savvas of Pittsburgh: I thank you for your effort to come be with us today. You have honored us with your presence and supported us with your prayers.

Your Grace Bishop Athenagoras of Nazianzos: I thank you warmly for your brotherly love, your presence, and your prayerful support during our Monastery's new beginning.

Your Grace Bishop Nektarios of Diokleia, Chancellor of the Holy Archdiocese of America: I thank you for your presence, for your love, and your valuable ministry to the Church and our Monastery.

I thank all of you because you are Hierarchs who love monasticism; who love the monasteries; who are aware that when a monastery prays, the Church breathes.

I also want to thank from the depth of my heart all the Abbots and Abbesses who have come to honor us with their presence today.

You know what the Abbacy means. You are aware of the nights, which no one sees; of the tears, which no one hears; of the responsibility, which no one understands. This is why I ask you: "Commemorate me in your prayers." Not as an Abbot; but as a brother who is beginning a difficult journey.

And to all the fathers and pilgrims who are here today, I thank you from the depth of my heart. Your presence is a big embrace for our Monastery.

I also want to thank each and every benefactor and donor of our Monastery. Some of you we know. Others, perhaps, we do not know. Some of you have offered much, and others have deprived yourselves to give the little you have. However, in the eyes of God there is no "large" and "small" offering. There is only love. Whatever you have offered, you did not give to us. You gave it to Christ. And Christ does not forget. Behind every stone found in this monastery there is a sacrifice. Behind every icon. There is love. Every vigil lamp contains an offering. And every faithful offering will one day become, in a manner that God knows, a prayer for the person who made the offering.

May God repay you one-hundred fold, and please know that you will always be in our prayers.

And now I want to speak to my own people. To the fathers of my brotherhood.
To my monastic community.

My fathers and brothers:

Today, I do not want to tell you what to do. I want to tell you what I am asking of you:

Help me to be saved. This is what I ask.
Do not allow me to loose my soul now that I became an Abbot
Do not allow me to forget that I am a monk.
Do not allow me to think that I have authority.
Always remind me that I am called to serve.
If you see me being prideful, correct me.
If you see me becoming hard, soften me with your love.
If you see that I becoming weary, support me.
If you see me fall, do not abandon me.
And if I ever hurt you, grant me the grace of your forgiveness.
I do not want a brotherhood where one person is afraid of another.
I want a brotherhood where one person lifts the burden of the other.
Whenever possible, let us cry together.
Let us pray together.
Let us struggle together.
Let us forgive one another.
So that at the end of each day, we may say: "Glory to God for putting me amongst you."
I do not want to be above you. I want to be with you.

And if God gives me the strength, I want to be in front of you only when it is necessary for me to lift the cross first. Not when it is necessary for me to receive recognition first.

And now I must stand before the memory of him who up until recently was standing here. I am referring to our Elder Joseph of blessed memory.

Geronda:

Today your seat is vacant. But your monastery is not empty. You are here. You are in our prayers. You are present with your counsels. You are present in our memories. At the moments we turn to you. But most of all, in this responsibility that I feel weighing down heavy on my shoulders today.

I do not want to replace you. I want to honor you.

I do not want to erase your identity. I want to continue it.

I do not want to become your successor only in title.

I want, as much as I possibly can, to continue showing the same love that you showed toward this brotherhood.

And if at some point this Monastery continues to be a place of consolation for the bereaved, if the Jesus Prayer continues to be heard here, if the resident monks continue to struggle for Christ, then your ministry will not have come to an end. It will have passed from the earth to heaven.

Elder Joseph:

Hold on to us from on high. And when we find things difficult, keep us in your prayers.

Prior to falling asleep in the Lord, our Elder Joseph of blessed memory expressed a particular wish to me, when I saw him for the last time and he could still speak. He said: "Give everyone my love and my blessing." I would go to his room every night, in order to tell him about the visitors who had come or had called (and the messages were very many) in order to ask for his prayers and blessings for all of them. And with this opportunity today as I speak to all of you, I convey to you the love and blessings of our Elder.

And so, today I cannot promise you that I will be perfect. But I can promise you that I will always struggle.

I cannot promise you that I will never fall. But I can promise that I will always try to get up again.

I cannot promise you that I will always have the right answer. But I can promise you that I will always seek the answer through prayer, the Church, through obedience and repentance.

Above all, I always want to remember who I am.

I am a monk. I am a brother. I am a deacon. And now I am called to become a father. And the name I have, the name of Saint Stephen, I want this name to be a reminder for me every day:

First ministry, then abbacy.

First obedience, then responsibility.

First humility, then lecturing.

First Christ, then everything else.

And if at some point after many years someone asks me: “Geronda, what did you accomplish at the Monastery?” I do not want to say: “We built many things,” or, “The Monastery became renowned,” or “Many people came to visit.” I would like to be able to say: “I do not know if we accomplished many things. I only know that we tried not to have the Jesus Prayer die out.”

If the Jesus Prayer does not go out, then the tradition continues. Saint Joseph the Hesychast will not have been forgotten. The venerable Elder Ephraim will not have been forgotten. Elder Joseph of blessed memory will not have been forgotten. And above all, Christ will still be present here.

For this reason, O Lord Jesus Christ, keep this monastery Yours. Do not allow it to become ours. Preserve our brotherhood united. Keep us humble. Keep us obedient. Keep us in love. Keep alive the Jesus Prayer that our Fathers have given to us. Keep lit the flame of Saint Joseph the Hesychast. Keep alive the legacy of our venerable Elder Ephraim. And give rest within Your embrace to our Elder Joseph of blessed memory.

And to me, O Lord, if you deem me worthy of standing before this brotherhood, grant only one thing to me: to never forget that I am not the master of their souls. I am their deacon. I am their brother. I am their father, only by grace. And when the time comes for me to also pass down that which You have entrusted to me today, deem me worthy of being able to say, “Lord, I did not keep this for myself. I preserved it for You. I did not attempt to keep people next to me; I tried to guide them to You. I did not live in order for people to love me; I tried to love them. And now, O Lord, do whatever I was not able to accomplish.”

This is it. This is my aspiration. For Christ to remain here. For the Panagia to remain here. For Saint Nektarios to remain here. For the Jesus Prayer of our fathers to remain here. For love to reign amongst us. And then, even if we come to pass, the monastery will continue to breathe. It will continue to pray. It will continue to console. It will continue to open its embrace. And when some person, on some night, at some hour, who is in pain and not knowing where to turn, arrives knocking on the door, he will find a lit candle. He will find an icon. He will find a monk. He will hear a prayer. And perhaps he will then say: “Glory to God. There still exists a place I can hope in.”

This is what I want our Monastery to be. This is why I will ask from all of you: Do not applaud me. Commemorate me in your prayers. Do not only wish me “Axios.”

Say one time for me:

“Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on our Abbot.
Have mercy on our brotherhood.
Have mercy on our Monastery.
Have mercy on your world.”

Perhaps then, with the grace of God, I will at some point become what all of you today are hoping I am. Not a great Abbot. But a small and humble monk, who learned to love Christ, to obey the Church, to serve his brothers, and up until his last breath to hope in the infinite mercy of God.

“Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me the sinner.”