



Archieratical Address of
His Eminence Metropolitan JOSEPH
Delivered at the Funeral of His Grace Bishop ANTOUN
Wednesday, October 11, 2017

Beloved Brother Hierarchs, Reverend Clergy, and Christ-loving Faithful, I embrace all of you with paternal love as we come together this morning to pray for our beloved Bishop ANTOUN to his eternal rest.

I return to you from the meetings of the Holy Synod of Antioch, and I bear with me the fervent prayers and heartfelt condolences of our Father-in-Christ, His Beatitude Patriarch JOHN X, as well as my brothers, the venerable Metropolitans of our Holy Patriarchate. We belong to one Antiochian family, and I can relay to you the loss of our beloved Bishop ANTOUN is profoundly felt by all.

I stand before you this morning with great reverence and immeasurable affection for my dear brother and concelebrant, and I am overwhelmed with gratitude for the years I was blessed to call him a friend and a mentor.

I stand before you this morning beholding our Bishop ANTOUN, and I reflect on the image he now presents to us of Our Great God and Savior Jesus Christ:

- ❖ He is vested as a High Priest , as one whose hands offered the Bloodless Sacrifice, and as one who fervently and tearfully offered prayers and supplications for his people;
- ❖ He is crowned as a King, not as one who lorded authority over others, but as one who always led as though he were the servant of all;
- ❖ He holds the Book of the Gospels as a Prophet, as one who expounded with authority the Word of God;
- ❖ And he bears the staff of a Shepherd, as one who was always there to guide his precious sheep and guard them with his own life.

While His Grace was a wonderful example of all of these Christ-like images, I will most remember Bishop ANTOUN as a *Shepherd*. We read in the Gospel of John, that the Good Shepherd loves the sheep: knowing each of them by name, protecting them from thieves and wolves, and providing them with abundant life.

As a good shepherd, His Grace did indeed love all of us – the hierarchs, clergy, and faithful. He offered himself wholeheartedly to us, and we could always count on his steadfastness, his courage, and his selflessness.

He had a particular love for the clergy. He gave many wonderful years to the formation of seminarians and raised up for this Archdiocese a generation of bishops and priests. He knew them by name and loved them. They knew his voice and loved him in return – even if the sound of that distinctive voice was sometimes stern and correcting, they knew his heart was that of a shepherd guiding and caring for them.

Who can forget the beautiful relationship he had with the children of our church? They were drawn in by this kind and gentle shepherd. His face would beam with joy as he led them in his favorite song – *You are My Sunshine*. I find it hard not to be moved to tears when I think of the banquet here in Miami, and I can still hear the voices of the young people singing to their beloved Bishop ANTOUN.

In these recent days, I found myself rereading a beautiful interview Bishop ANTOUN gave to Bishop JOHN for *The Word* magazine. In reading his account of his long life of service to this Archdiocese, I called to mind the sacrificial love of the Good Shepherd described by Our Lord. His Grace reminisced about his arrival in the United States in 1959 and described the development of his longtime friendship with His Eminence Metropolitan PHILIP into a dynamic partnership that transformed our Archdiocese.

With his sacrificial love, he worked side-by-side with His Eminence in building a new headquarters for the Archdiocese, creating the Antiochian Women, Teen

SOYO, and the Order of Saint Ignatius, establishing the Antiochian Village, and welcoming the Evangelical Orthodox Church and countless others home into the green pastures of Holy Orthodoxy.

In the interview, His Grace beautifully remarked: "Since my consecration as a bishop, I traveled throughout the Archdiocese. All of my work brought me happiness. The love of my life is this Archdiocese, her people, and especially the clergy." These are words of a true shepherd who gave himself to his flock with love and joy.

One of my favorite verses of Scripture comes from Psalm 54: "Oh that I had wings of a dove! I would fly away and be at rest." The context of the psalm is the betrayal of a close friend, one with whom the psalmist walked to the house of God and took sweet counsel, and can be said as a prayer during times of tribulation.

This morning, Sayidna ANTOUN does indeed fly away to be at rest but not out of a desire to leave us behind. To the contrary, he was our close friend and never betrayed us, nor did we betray him. He is our

faithful companion, and far from leaving us orphaned, he will take his rest while never ceasing to intercede for us at the Throne of the Almighty God. And he also now flies away to be rejoined for all eternity to his most faithful friend, His Eminence Metropolitan PHILIP. We are assured that they will be forever united in loving prayers for us, their grateful flock.

I stand before you this morning, and I grieve with you the passing of this great man of God; but we grieve – not as ones who have no hope – but as faithful sheep knowing that our shepherds, Sayidna PHILIP and Sayidna ANTOUN, will continue by their prayers to guide us to the abundant life that is found in Christ's Holy Church.

To the faithful of this Archdiocese, and particularly this diocese of Miami and the Southeast, I offer my paternal love and my solemn oath to live up to the example of this godly shepherd in caring for you, my beloved flock. And I have complete confidence in my brother, His Grace Bishop NICHOLAS, that he will do

likewise as he takes up the ministry of his venerable predecessor.

To the family and loved ones of our beloved Bishop ANTOUN, I offer – on behalf of my brother hierarchs and the clergy and faithful of this God-protected Archdiocese – heartfelt condolences and all of my love and prayers. We also offer our gratitude for your sharing of him with us, for his sacrifices on our behalf could not have come without your sacrifices as well.

Your Grace Bishop ANTOUN - Your legacy of love will never be forgotten. We shall never lose our gratitude for all of your joy, your sincerity, your self-sacrifice, and of course your *sunshine*. As you fly away to take your rest at the right hand of the Most High and to live in the Light that shall never be overtaken by night, remember us your grateful and loving children in your holy prayers.

May your memory be eternal, my brother and concelebrant!

+ Metropolitan JOSEPH