

Salutatory Address
On the Occasion of the Installation Banquet of Bishop Benjamin
to the Episcopal See of San Francisco and the West

Your Beatitude, Most Reverend and Right Reverend Hierarchs, Clergy,
Monastics and Faithful of the Diocese of the West:

Through the ineffable mercy of God, I, a sinful man, have been elected and installed today as Bishop of San Francisco and the West, the oldest episcopal see in the Lower 48. I have been called by God through the Holy Synod of the Orthodox Church in America to be, first of all, a servant. Beneath the layers of Byzantine vestments stands the *episcopos*, the overseer. It is the title of the head slave in a household. Far from being the master himself, the overseer is the one who must give account to the master for the work of all the other servants in the house. In an ancient household, if the dinner was not on the table, it was the overseer, not the cook, who had to answer to the master. And you all are those other servants of God's household. Not just I, but you all too have been called out of the world to serve God in the world, to make Him present wherever you live, wherever you work, wherever you play.

Another image connected with the role of a hierarch in the Church of God is that of a bridegroom. St. Patriarch Tikhon, the former occupant of this cathedra, said this in 1898 when he arrived in San Francisco:

“By the will of God I in my unworthiness have also been summoned here to apostolic service, ... from now on through the Lord Himself we will become closely united in the mutual affiliation of a bishop to his flock and of a flock to its bishop. In the writings of the holy fathers this affiliation is compared to matrimony: the bishop is like a bridegroom to the flock – his bride. And as a husband loves his wife, so that he leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to her, allying himself with her and coming to live with her, so a bishop must love his flock. And as a wife obeys her husband, so the flock must obey its bishop...From now on I will direct my thoughts and cares to you and to your benefit. From now on I will consecrate my strengths and talents to serving you. I come to you with love, brethren, I request you also receive me with love. My love will be expressed in care and solicitude towards you, in serving you; and your love should manifest itself in obedience to me, in trusting me and in cooperation with me.”

There are those who look at bishops and see nothing but authority and power. But these things are illusions. The relationship between bridegroom and his bride, the hierarch and his flock, is founded upon nothing less than love. Whatever the shepherd asks of his flock he does so for the good, the health, and the salvation of his flock. And the flock obeys, not because it fears him, God forbid, but because it knows the shepherd loves the flock and will lay down his life for them. This is Christian obedience. It is not oppressive, it is liberating.

St. Tikhon took this image of bridegroom and bride to its very end. We hear in the epistle reading during the sacrament of Holy Matrimony these words of St. Paul to the Church in Ephesus: "...the husband is the head of the wife, as also Christ is the head of the Church, and is Himself Savior of the body... Husbands, be loving to your own wives, even as Christ also loved the Church and gave Himself up for her..." As Christ poured out His very life for the Church, His bride, so St. Tikhon poured out his very life for his bride, his flock. First in North America, his life was not his own. He traveled tirelessly across this continent visiting communities and consecrating temples. We are blessed with having several of them still in our diocese. And then, called back to Russia and made Patriarch, St. Tikhon gave his life for his flock and became a confessor under the Bolsheviks.

Brethren, I am not that man. And, I am unworthy to sit in his place. But, I have the faith that the Holy Spirit will complete that which is lacking in me, that He will work in and through me, despite my weaknesses and failings. I also am assured that you, my bride, will love me and give me the support I need to fulfill my calling among you. This is the great mystery of the Church. God takes what is weak and broken, discarded by the world, and makes it into the Body of Christ, His own chosen people and a new nation among all the nations of the world.

If I may close by quoting St. Paul in the very same epistle:

"I bow my knees before the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from Whom every family in the heavens and on earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the wealth of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ might dwell in your hearts through faith, having been rooted and founded in love, in order that ye might be able to apprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and depth

and height, and to know the love of Christ which surpasseth knowledge, that ye might be filled to all the fullness of God.”

This is my prayer for you and my only purpose among you: that you know the love of Christ and that He dwell in your hearts.

Thank you.