

**ON THE REPOSE OF OUR DEAR BROTHER AND
CONCELEBRANT, ARCHMANDRITE (JOHN) SERAPHIM POULOS**

August 2, 2018

In St. Gregory the Theologian's panegyric funeral oration for his friend St. Basil the Great, he spoke of "that tyrannical illness" which took the life of St. Basil at the age of 49. He said in his oration, "*Finishing his course and as he heard the summoning by our Loving Lord Jesus Christ, he could see his guardian angel showing him the way to his heavenly abode in our Father's heavenly mansion.*"

Fr. Seraphim, as a young man, was called from an early age to follow Jesus Christ. In a world that promotes celebrity and sports idols, this anointed servant of Christ was called. As St. Paul once quoted the Prophet Jeremiah, even from my mother's womb the calling was prescribed (cf., Galatians 1.15, Jeremiah 1.5). Where most young people had their pop-cultural posters on their walls, this young man had churches and saints decorate his world. The Church became his second home. He always seemed to yearn for the world and life of Christ and His Church.

He was a homeboy, among others from this small parish of Ithaca, who did good; loved his roots here; and endeared his beloved homeland here in the Finger Lakes. It's no different from being born in a small town called Bethlehem. Family, friends and *parea* were his formative years. He was called, however, and the calling brought him to Boston at Holy Cross, where many colleagues, who have been sending their condolences, became friends – they became brothers in Christ – and we all entered that brotherhood which bonded us to one another in Christ Jesus. We are now in the midst of understanding about losing a contemporary in our Kairos.

Yesterday was one of the commemorations of the Cross, and the Gospel spoke on our ministry to serve Christ, which Fr. Seraphim so took to heart. Christ tells His Apostles, "*Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. Beware of men; for they will deliver you up to the councils, and flog you in their synagogues, and you will be dragged before governors and kings for My sake to bear testimony before them and the Gentiles. When they deliver you up, don't be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say; for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour; for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you... he who endures to the end will be saved (Matthew 10.16-22).*"

Yes, Fr. Seraphim's tenure as a priest in our holy Church and Archdiocese was stellar, and you can read on the parish's Facebook the letters from our Hierarchs, and words that have been shared by all who were touched by his dedication, love and service throughout the years. There were times that he suffered; when he was hurt and disappointed, but he continued to persevere over all hurdles placed before him. When he finished his years of serving large parishes – our Metropolises, our Archdiocese – he went and retired from his assignments of service. He ran his course and years of service from everyday responsibilities, and came back to his beloved hometown to be with his endeared family and friends.

As I said to many in the parishes of Rochester, Syracuse and now in Ithaca, it is impressive how you love your faith and how it shows to people who come to visit the area. It shows! So as Father Seraphim came home and settled into a new life of peace, the subtle tug of the Holy Spirit kept moving him as his place was still at the holy altar of our Lord in His Church.

Father Seraphim called and told His Eminence Metropolitan Nicholas that he would like to serve the people of his hometown, as he felt a calling to serve at a different capacity. And as he was getting acclimated to his hometown, his boyhood parish and his endeared people, he received news that he had a tyrannical illness. His perspective was, "I'll deal with it, do the best I can; depend on the Lord; and trust in Him wherever it takes me."

As it says in the Book of Romans, "Since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through Whom we have gained access by faith into this Grace in which we stand, and we exult in the hope of the Glory of God. Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance produces character; character produces hope; and hope does not disappoint because God has poured out His Love into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, Which He has given to us (5.1-5)."

Father Seraphim fought the good fight! He gave it his best fight! His will was to continue, but his body's strength sadly ebbed away. When all things were coming to pass, it seemed to be orchestrated from above. Fr. Michael Bahlatzis of the Annunciation Church in Vestal arrived one Sunday and administered the Holy Gifts from the Liturgy, and Father Seraphim was able to receive Communion as a priest one last time. He was then able to allow his soul to embark on his heavenly journey to receive his crown and celebrate his holy priesthood: "*Thou art a priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek (Hebrews 5.6),*" in God's heavenly Kingdom along with the Heavenly Hosts responding to this glorifying worship.

St. Gregory, for his friend St. Basil in 379 AD, exclaims in that famous funeral oration, “*And now he is in heaven where, if I am not mistaken, he is offering sacrifices for us, and praying for us, and praying for his people, for though he has left us, he has not entirely left us.*”

This is a foretaste of the New Creation mentioned in the Book of Revelation: “*I saw a new heaven and a new earth. I heard a loud voice speaking from the Throne. Now God’s Throne is with men! He will live with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them, and He will be their God. He will wipe away all tears from their eyes. There will be no more death, no more grief, nor pain. The old things have disappeared. Then He Who sits on the Throne said, ‘And now I make all things new (21.1-5)!’*”

In our holy faith and Church, we all come together during the Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom, both those who are here working out their salvation (cf., Philippians 1.28), and those who have received their heavenly crown. In this context, we call to remembrance our beloved departed from this life and pray for their eternal memory. For those endeared and those whom endeared us, Agape is eternal, as its Source is our Resurrected, Eternal and Everlasting Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

It is our prayer today that our compassionate and comforting Lord extends His peace to you, Katherine and Toula (Father Seraphim’s sisters), and your families on the falling asleep in the Lord of your dear brother, Father Seraphim. On behalf of His Eminence Metropolitan Nicholas of Detroit; the brother Clergy of our Holy Metropolis, especially those who really knew him as a brother clergyman and friend; the parish here of St. Catherine – in whom your family has deep roots, and which is embraced in the depths of your hearts; and the faithful upon whose souls he left an indelible mark, may our Lord grant him eternal rest, and may his dear memory be eternal. Aionia Tou i Mnimni. Amen.

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