

Fr George Papadeas, a Priest for All Seasons

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By Rev. Dr. Miltiades B. Efthimiou

I coined this familiar phrase many years ago in reference to St. Nicholas: many groups of people from the U.S.A. as well as from Europe took the annual "St. Nicholas Pilgrimage", sponsored by the Order of St. Andrew, the Archons, to Myra, (Demre), Turkey, the actual See of St. Nicholas. I am coining the phrase once again for one of the foremost clerics of our time, who fell asleep in the Lord very recently; the very Rev. George Papadeas. He, in the footsteps of St. Nicholas, was a modern "wonderworker" and, indeed, a Priest For All Seasons, by what he accomplished in his 93 years of life. Like St. Nicholas, he was constantly helping people and projects in need. I take great pride in writing about him because as a young boy, I grew up with this gifted cleric in the 1940's when he served as a deacon to the late Fr. Basil Efthimiou, Dean of the NY Cathedral of the Holy Trinity.

I accompanied him and my late father many times; like our first trip, accompanying the great Athenagoras, to Garrison, NY, to see if this should be the site of St. Basil's Academy. But I knew him even before this, when I took time off from "Ira Allen" grade school, (across the street from the Boston Cathedral,) to accompany my father and the then Director of Pomfret, Bishop Cavadas, to Pomfret Conn., the first Greek Orthodox Theological School erected in 1937, and graduating the most prolific American priests to serve as pioneers for the embryonic Archdiocese of N. and S. America, which was struggling to survive in the pluralistic world of numerous religions and denominations. The young George, from Altoona, Pa., was the first ordained priest of that first class of 1942. He immediately was assigned to serve the NY Cathedral, and in the early 1950's, with the blessing of his mentor, went to establish the first Greek Orthodox Church in all of Long Island, which soon was to become the St. Paul's Cathedral, which in the late 50's was to receive international attention when the icon of the Blessed Mother, the Virgin Mary, teared in a home of a devout young couple. My ministry began under the tutelage of Fr. George shortly after my ordination in 1958, pretty much as it was with Fr. George's mentor, my late father, 16 years earlier.

Fr. Papadeas, a Priest for All Seasons, will be remembered for many things.

Along with Fr. George Poulos, the Ionian Village was inaugurated in Greece, to acquaint the young in America with their heritage and roots. The printing of the Holy Week Book which helped millions appreciate the beauty of the services of Holy Week. Under his supervision, my first assignment was to develop, along with others, the first series of Religious Catechitcal books for Sunday Schools nationwide, at a time when there was sparse material for educating the young in Christian Orthodoxy. At a time when most priests retired, Fr. George continued his ministry by establishing communities in Florida. His last one was in Ocala, Fla. Mind you, for years he drove for 2 to 3 hours every Sunday to conduct services in Ocala. He was ministering to that parish when he fell asleep in the Lord. That was Fr. George, of blessed memory!

Fr. Papadeas will also be remembered for the influence he had on the young.

He played a role in assisting the Dean of the NY Cathedral in sending a young Fr. John Romanides to Pomfret, who, upon graduating Holy Cross, went on to become one of the foremost Orthodox theologians in the world! He found time to even form a NY Cathedral football team, which marched every year in the Greek Parade down 5th Ave' in full football regalia, and past Athenagoras and prominent ship owners, lawyers, doctors, statesmen, in the reviewing stand situated in front of the Cathedral on E. 74th St.! That was Fr. George! He assisted the Dean in establishing the Greek American Day School at the Cathedral. Space doesn't allow me to review all his accomplishments, such as the founding of the RCA, (Retired Clergymen Association), who along with several other luminaries and pioneer priests of blessed memory who contributed to this major effort, giving a source of comfort to all the retired clergy, in particular to those in need. RCA continues the work began so many years ago by those pioneer clerics. Fr. Papadeas stood for one thing, which is his legacy to many generations of clerics in the vineyard: hard work, in promoting Christ's ministry, whether in building a church edifice, writing books, or confronting the unseen enemy, wherever he might be lurking. His admonition to many of us who looked to him as a role model of pastoral leadership was something he learned from his mentor: IPOMONI KAI EPIMONI, or, patience and persistence, in whatever you do, toward His greater glory. This guided many of us to always strive for the best that is in us to serve our Lord and His people.

May this cleric, "A Priest For All Seasons", rest in peace amongst all the other pioneers and luminaries who contributed so much to making Orthodoxy a realistic presence in the Americas.

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