

## Explanation of the Service of Enthronement

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The Greek Orthodox Church traces its origins to the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus Christ's apostles, but it acquired liturgical pageantry and ceremonial splendor from its association with the Christian Roman Empire, spanning from the dedication of Constantinople on 11 May 330 to the city's fall on 29 May 1453. The Enthronement of a Hierarch reflects both these dimensions of the Orthodox Christian Church.

Ritual enthronement of a bishop as the beginning of his ministry is found in the late fourth-century document known as *Apostolic Constitutions* (probably written in Antioch between AD 375 and 380). Long before clergy wore distinctive vestments or the bishop's staff developed, sitting in the seat of authority (*cathedra* or "throne") in a city's principal church building was regarded as the primary symbol of episcopal rule. The Byzantine Church invested the bishop's throne with meaning taken from pre-Christian models: the emperor's seat of imperial power, the Jewish notion of Solomon's throne of wise judgment, and the chair of honor from which Hellenistic teachers instructed their students. Ascending his throne for the first time, the bishop assumes his responsibilities as administrator, adjudicator, and teacher.

Today's service begins in the church's courtyard where Metropolitan Gerasimos arrives wearing the distinctive black garb of an Orthodox monk, including the monastic veil. Around his neck he wears an *engolpion* (a large enameled pendant bearing an icon of Jesus Christ or Mary and the Christ child) that only hierarchs wear. Standing outside the doors of the cathedral (the principal church of a diocese, location of the bishop's *cathedra*), he puts on a long vestment of crimson silk known as the *mandyas*. Originating as a simple Roman cloak around the end of the second century, it evolved into a garment denoting power and worn by the emperor or someone invested as head of a monastery or diocese. The primate of the Greek Orthodox Church in the United States, Archbishop Demetrios, hands Metropolitan Gerasimos the pastoral staff (*rabdos*), signifying his pastoral and disciplinary responsibilities. The staff is surmounted with two serpents attacking but being held off by the holy cross. He is now completely vested as the bishop of this diocese.

The new Metropolitan processes into his cathedral church accompanied by the clergy of the Metropolis and hierarchs of other Orthodox dioceses. Byzantine imperial protocol prescribes that the presiding hierarch be escorted by incense and episcopal candelabras: the two-branched *dikerion* signifying the two natures of Christ (human and divine) and the three-branched *trikerion* signifying the Holy Trinity. He enters the sanctuary or *bema* of the church and venerates the Gospel Book and Altar Table. Inside the sanctuary he vests for liturgical leadership by putting on the priestly stole (*epritrachelion*) and episcopal *omophorion* (roughly equivalent to the *pallium*), traditionally made of wool to remind the hierarch that he is to emulate Jesus Christ as Good Shepherd. The procession continues with the fully-vested bishop blessing his spiritual flock, who greet him with the sung acclamation "Many Years, Master!" Finally, the Metropolitan ascends his throne for the first time as the diocese's chief priest and teacher.

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His initial duty is to lead the assembled Church in a brief service of doxology. The hymns of this service are thoroughly celebratory, taken mostly from the feast of Pentecost. In the first four hymns, the Holy Spirit is credited with making the apostles (fishermen by trade) into wise evangelists, creating unity among divided peoples, and providing abundantly for all. The following hymn, “*Ti ipermacho*” (“To the defender and commander”), was composed in thanksgiving for deliverance from the Avar siege of Constantinople in AD 626; the Virgin Mary was credited with protecting the city for the glory of her Son. The chanted “Great Doxology” (*Gloria in excelsis*) is an elaboration of Lk 2:14 and dates back to the late fourth century. The “Litany of Fervent Supplication” is the prayer of the people directly to God, consisting of the deacon’s biddings to remember particular people and concerns in their prayers: the Church’s episcopal leadership in general, the new Metropolitan, the health and safety of all Christians, and the protection of the city and country. As chief priest and shepherd of the local Church, the bishop concludes the community’s prayer and offers it to God. Then he prays for the well-being, strengthening, and protection of the spiritual flock under his care. Responding in song, the people pray “O Lord, keep our Master and Archpriest for many years!” The service ends with the usual dismissal, invoking the intercessions of holy women and men from throughout the ages for God’s mercy and salvation.

Having begun his tenure by leading of the local Church in prayer and offering priestly intercession for their protection and salvation, he now delivers his Enthronement Address as a way of beginning his ministry of preaching, teaching, and pastoral leadership.

It is easy for modern observers to focus on the presentation of the staff as the pivotal moment of this service, but this particular action (emphasized by Latin theologians in the late medieval period) is of relatively little importance. Each hierarch has been invested with all episcopal vestments and regalia at his ordination; nothing more can be added. The significance of today’s ritual is his entrance into the cathedral as bishop of the diocese. He leads the people in prayer and they, in return, greet him with the Byzantine-era acclamations of “Worthy!” and “Many years!” Although His Eminence, Gerasimos, officially became Metropolitan of San Francisco at the brief service of commissioning (*Mega Minima*) on Feb 25, this is the ceremonial beginning of his ministry.

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