

Response to His Grace, Bishop Weigand of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Sacramento
Offered by His Eminence, Metropolitan Gerasimos of San Francisco
**On the Occasion of the Celebration of the Reception of
the Holy Relics of Ss. Joachim and Anna**

Your Grace Bishop Wiegand, Reverend clergy, brothers and sisters in Christ,

“Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you wholly; and may your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” I have chosen to begin my brief remarks this evening with this verse taken from the fifth chapter of Saint Paul’s First Letter to the Thessalonians for two reasons: First, the Holy Relics which are the cause of our celebration this weekend were gifted to a delegation from the Church of Saint Anna within walking distance from where Saint Paul preached to the Thessalonians nearly 2,000 years ago and; Second, having concluded solemn, yet celebratory prayers, we remain...together...in this most majestic Cathedral, in the physical presence of those who were sanctified...in spirit...in soul...and in body, the blessed Ancestors of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Saints Joachim and Anna.

To be sanctified, that is, to advance through the stages of holiness, whether these steps be likened to the rungs of a ladder as they are often compared in the monastic centers or simply expressive of the spiritual pursuits and disciplines that we maintain in the world in our parishes, it is for this that we were created. Our God who is both the beginning and the end is Holy, the Holy, and we His children are called to be Holy. It is a lifelong endeavor that is characterized by spiritual peaks and valleys, but we remain confident that through our efforts and God’s unending Grace, we may be found worthy, upon our repose, to hear these blessed words, “Well done, good and faithful servant.”

Since the time of my enthronement in 2005 as the Bishop of the Metropolis of San Francisco, I have contemplated the means by which the Church may better assist the faithful, both clergy and laity, in their pursuit of sanctification. More candidly, how is the Holy and historical Church of Eastern Christendom to tend to its flock and to inspire the faithful in the Western coast of the New World in the second millennium? I remember at the time of my enthronement promoting the ideal of “Family Wellness” as a means to this end. I envisioned and continue to envision the establishment of a Wellness Center that would provide marriage enrichment programs, parenting classes, singles, men’s and women’s ministries, and special programs designed for the elderly, as the staff addressed substance abuse, addictions, depression, and an array of other ailments which plague our holistic health, making the process of sanctification seemingly impossible.

How would these ministries to the Orthodox family be unique, effective, and authentic to the Church, the Body of Christ? To answer this question, I prayed and I read. It was in the fourth century Constantinople that I found an answer to my dilemma - an answer that has brought us to this evening.

Whether in the fourth century or in the twenty first century, Christians struggle with freedom. During the tumultuous days of Christian persecution, men, women, and children clung to their faith, even unto death, receiving the crowns of martyrdom and salvation. In the new found freedom of the fourth century, as Christianity went through a dramatic shift, transitioning from an illegal religion to the Faith of the Empire, Christians became lax and uninspired. What did the Church of Constantinople do? The Church

brought to the Queen of Cities, Holy Relics from the other Sees of Christendom to sanctify the land and the faithful...to begin a metamorphosis of Creation and to form saints in the likeness and image of those who came before them, who had ever so perfectly put on Christ in spirit, in soul, and in body.

Now, if the Orthodox Church has been in the West for one hundred or even two hundred years, by the standards of Church history, we remain an infant Church. Yes, this land and her people need the fullness of the Faith that is found in every consecrated Church in which the Eucharist is celebrated and the Nicene Faith is proclaimed. In like manner of the fourth century See of Constantinople, this land and her people also need the transformative power of Holy Relics outside of the Sanctuary, in the midst of the people, which makes the Saints, the sanctified, in this case, Joachim and Anna, accessible to the people for veneration as we seek their holy intercessions before the Throne of their grandson, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

It is for this reason that the Church of Saint Anna labored to locate a Holy Relic of Saint Joachim to remain enshrined in her House of Worship forever and to sanctify our Metropolis ministry of Family Wellness. It was in this spirit that I initially wrote to Cardinal Keeler requesting his assistance. It was in this spirit that the clergy of Saint Anna were directed to correspond with the elder and priest monk Cherubim of the Theophileon Brotherhood, who was himself responsible for the gifting of the Holy Relic of Saint Anna that the community received in 2005.

It was by the Grace of God that our efforts and our prayers would culminate in this weekend's festivities, celebrating the reception of the Holy Relics of Saints Joachim and Anna, relics which as Your Grace has mentioned, had been in the care of the Roman Catholic Church for over 1,000 years until they were gifted to a monastic brotherhood of the Skete of Saint Anna, which would in turn gift them to this youthful and vibrant parish in Roseville, California – a parish that will be declared at the close of Divine Services in the morning hour, a Shrine of the Metropolis, dedicated to the Sanctity of Marriage and Family.

In closing, allow me to offer my gratitude and that of the Orthodox faithful for bringing us to your recently renovated and rededicated Cathedral to celebrate this blessing. Your Grace, accept these small tokens of our affection and appreciation:

First, a hand carved icon of Christ, the High Priest. It was prepared by master wood carver George Oikonmidis in Thessalonica, Greece; a similar piece was offered by Patriarch Bartholomew on such an occasion. (Dn. Joseph to present gift)

Second, during Father Christopher's recent trip to Thessalonica and to the Holy Mountain, he was able to pray the Feast of the Dormition of Saint Anna at the Skete of Saint Anna. It is the custom of the Skete on this, the feast of the monastery, to bring forth for veneration all the Holy Relics entrusted to their care. Relics of Apostles, martyrs, Holy Fathers, desert fathers, as well as a piece of the Holy and Life-giving Cross, and the entire left foot of Saint Anna were brought forth. Blessed over all of these Holy Relics was this prayer rope that we offer to you to assist you in your personal devotion to our Lord. (Dn. Joseph to present gift)

May God bless you Your Grace, your ministry, the faithful of your Diocese and this region. And, as we go forth this evening, let us offer a final prayer that these Holy Relics

to be enshrined in the only Greek Orthodox Church of our Archdiocese of America dedicated to and seeking the intercessions of Saint Anna, located just north of the San Joaquin Valley, will sanctify this land and her people. “Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you wholly; and may your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” through the holy intercessions of Saints Joachim and Anna, the Ancestors of Christ, ever present, here, in our midst!