Your Beatitude, Your Eminences, Your Graces, Very Reverend Monastics, Very Reverend and Reverend Fathers, brothers and sisters in Christ: Glory to Jesus Christ!

October 31 is a provocative day on which to meet your future bishop in the company of diocesan clergy at a New Age Tibetan Buddhist themed restaurant. Several of us gathered for lunch at the Cosmic Café on Oak Lawn Avenue, here in Dallas. At one point our waitress approached, looking a little embarrassed, she asked whether we were actually priests—or simply dressed up for Halloween. Looking back, I suppose men in black robes having lunch at the Cosmic Café on October 31 did warrant a little investigation.

Our future bishop had come for the episcopal consecration of the first bishop of Fort Worth, and, as it happened, he and I stood next to one another in rank order during the ordination service. I believe our priestly ordinations are close enough together to put us in the same neighborhood.

Of course, in those days he was Abbot Gerasim. And in my mind, he was **THE Abbot Gerasim**, of Platina, of the Saint Herman Brotherhood.

Now, I myself was a faithful son of Saint Vladimir's Seminary, a disciple of Father Thomas Hopko, and therefore not too far removed from Father Alexander Schmemann—though I would never have called myself a "Schmemannarian." So I confess that I approached these initial encounters with a certain reserve. I had read *Not of This World*, I had lived through the polemics of the '90s, and I knew enough to expect that we might have to agree to disagree on certain topics.

Our next encounter was again in Dallas, during the spring 2009 session of the Holy Synod. We spoke briefly in the hotel lobby. And there I began to recognize something that has become clearer to me over the years: here was a man who could not be contained within the familiar polemics—Father Seraphim Rose versus Father Alexander Schmemann, ROCOR versus the OCA, traditionalist versus modernist—and all the loyalties and suspicions that gather around those accusations.

Here was a man who loved the Lord, and whose love for the Lord made room for other people.

Little did I know that the Holy Synod was already considering him for episcopal ministry within the OCA—possibly in Alaska, as I understood it then.

That was many years ago. Studies at Saint Vladimir's followed, time in the Yukon Delta with Father Michael Oleksa, service at Holy Virgin Mary Cathedral in Los Angeles, and eventually assignment here at Saint Seraphim Cathedral.

Then came nomination to lead this diocese, and the disappointment when that nomination did not result in election. I remember asking him, "Will you leave? If so, it would be understandable."

But he stayed.

He stayed in obedience, like the good monk that he is. He continued to pray, to serve, and to care for the people entrusted to him.

In time came election and consecration as Bishop of Fort Worth, episcopal service alongside Archbishop Alexander, and now, more than eighteen years after that Halloween lunch: Bishop of Dallas and the South. The third man to hold that title.

[It sounds good, Vladyka.

So what hope, Vladyka, do you bring us? And what do we expect from you?]

On this day, I cannot help but think of the ever-memorable Archbishop Dmitri, the first ruling bishop of this diocese. He and Bishop Gerasim are very different men. But in one respect they are very much alike: they both love people and are energized by them. They want to be with them. They long to be true shepherds. In Bishop Gerasim, I recognize something of that same delight in his people that so many of us remember in Archbishop Dmitri.

And how do we understand this calling to shepherd the flock of Christ? Here we can turn to the second ruling bishop of the Diocese of the South, Bishop Gerasim's immediate predecessor, our beloved Archbishop Alexander.

In his writings on Saint Dionysius the Areopagite, Archbishop Alexander directs our attention to the purpose of hierarchy: likeness to God and union with him. Those who receive the light of Christ are called to communicate that light generously to others. The whole life of the Church is a movement toward God, in which we help one another draw nearer to him.

Saint Maximus the Confessor gives this movement a striking liturgical expression. He sees in the bishop's entrance into the sanctuary and ascent to his throne an image of Christ's Ascension and return to the heavenly throne.

Christ ascends bearing the humanity he has made his own. He brings our human nature into the presence of his Father. His enthronement is the promise of our own calling: where he is, there we also are invited to be.

And the bishop ascends his throne wearing the omophorion—the image of the sheep carried upon the shoulders of the Good Shepherd.

The throne, the Shepherd, and the sheep all belong together.

The shepherd is entrusted with this place so that he may carry his people: bearing their burdens, seeking the wandering, strengthening the weary, and bringing them home to the God. His ministry is to help the whole flock ascend in Christ to the Father.

Vladyka, over these eighteen years, we have witnessed with joy how you have borne the burdens of others and to remained with them, even when remaining was costly. Today we ask God to strengthen that gift in you.

And so, as we enter this new chapter of the life of our Diocese, to you, our Bishop and Father, we offer our love and our service. As you lift us up in your prayers, we will uphold you in ours.

As you call us to follow Christ, we eagerly hear your voice, and through your example, pledge to serve, to forgive, and to carry one another.

May the Lord grant that, together, we may bring many others with us into the joy of His Kingdom.

Eis polla eti, Despota!