

**KEYNOTE ADDRESS OF
HIS EMINENCE
ARCHBISHOP DEMETRIOS OF AMERICA**

**AT THE 21st CHURCH ASSEMBLY – SABOR
of the Serbian Orthodox Church in North and South America**

“SERVANT LEADERSHIP”

**St. Steven’s Serbian Orthodox Cathedral
Alhambra, California**

August 5, 2014

Whosoever will be first among you, let him be your servant
Matthew 20:27

Your Grace, Bishop Maxim, Brother Hierarch and Gracious Host of this Assembly;

Your Graces, Bishops Georgije, Longin, and Mitrophan, Beloved Brother Hierarchs,

Reverend Presbyters and Deacons, Beloved Fellow Servants of the Lord, Esteemed and Honorable Lay Members of the Diocesan Councils and Parish Councils;

Brothers and sisters in Christ:

I offer thanks to the Lord and I am filled with great joy in being with all of you on this auspicious occasion of the opening of your 21st Church Assembly—Sabor, and to gather with you in this magnificent house of prayer, Saint Steven’s Cathedral. The holy patron of this church surely smiles upon us today as we consider a topic that was the essence of his life.

When Saint Steven became king, he became the superb example of Christian rulers. He acted not as an arrogant, domineering sovereign, but as a wise and humble steward, a servant. He became the king-servant or the servant-king. Through his holy intercessions, may our words and our proceedings at this Sabor continue the ministry of love and mercy that he practiced out of love for Christ.

1. Non-Servant Leadership

This Sabor is convened around the theme of “Servant Leadership.” A more appropriate theme could hardly be chosen. We live in a society that hears the expression “servant leadership” as an oxymoron, as a contradiction in terms at the most fundamental level. In most of the world, “servant leadership” makes as much sense as the phrase “working vacation” or “merciful murder.” Most would say that a leader is the one who *gives orders*; a servant is the one who *follows orders*. But in the Church the words “servant” and “leader” are not defined in terms of giving and receiving commands.

At a time when the twelve disciples were bickering over places of authority among themselves, Christ called them over to say (Matthew 20: 25-28):

You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

Our theme of Servant Leadership is appropriate and timely, just because the ways of Christ are so different from the ways of the world, and we so often need a reminder not to slip into the examples of behavior that we see around us in modern society, the examples of *non-servant* leadership. And what is it that we see?

We see around us leadership that is based on the power that comes with *money*. "He who has the money makes the rules." Among the very wealthy, there is an expectation that financial success entitles a person to the respect and obedience of the many. This is a very dangerous presumption. J.P. Morgan, the famous banking tycoon, once said: "Of all forms of tyranny the least attractive and the most vulgar is the tyranny of mere wealth, the tyranny of plutocracy." Leadership based on the power of money is a leadership of manipulation and coercion, and often a leadership that deals in the lowest common denominator of human passions and motivations.

In the present world we see also leadership based on *military power*. "Might makes right," the cynics would say. The classic example of this is the *Pax Romana*, the brand of peace that the ancient Romans brought to the world at the point of a sword. The Caesars of the Roman Empire took it for granted that military might bestowed upon them the mantle of leadership and dominion over their neighbors. This myth has darkened minds in all ages, and it is still with us today. Remember the enormous suffering of the world caused by the leadership of military power of Nazi Germany.

In the world we see also leadership based on the power of *intellect*, on the ability to persuade, to enchant, and often to distract and deceive the mind of the masses. Some believe that a high IQ comes with the right to take charge, the power to decide for others what is in their best interests. Knowledge, however, is not wisdom. René Descartes, a very intelligent man once said, "The greatest minds are capable of the greatest vices as well as the greatest virtues." In our own time, Thomas Sowell made the point more sharply, "Few of the great tragedies of history were created by the village idiot, and many by the village genius."

Modern times have seen the rise of another kind of non-servant leadership: leadership based on the *power of celebrity*. We see today artists, musicians, sports figures, and actors using their fame to exert influence on their adoring audiences, sometimes for good and sometimes for ill. It is an unexplainable phenomenon: a person who shows skill in some artistic or athletic endeavor is accepted absolutely as an expert and leader in matters

of law, politics, economics, and morality. There are celebrities who seek the privileges of leadership in society without any of the costs and without the necessary qualifications. Leadership based on popularity creates followers without character.

There is, finally, a kind of non-servant leadership based on *political power*. On the face of it, this may seem like an error. Is not political power the one kind of legitimate worldly leadership? Is not an elected official or an anointed king precisely the person to exercise authority in a leadership position? So it would seem. But there is a danger in political power itself. Power can be intoxicating, addictive, hard to let go, whether it is the power of a minor bureaucrat or of a chief executive.

It is said that King George III of England asked his court portraitist, Benjamin West, what his fellow American George Washington would do with himself once America had won its independence. West answered that he expected that Washington would go back to his farm in Virginia. King George is said to have replied, "If he does that, he will be the greatest man in the world." The king understood well that many a leader who begins his career as a servant of the people over time comes to be their master and despot. Only a politician of the strongest character can resist the corrupting allure of power.

The Lord said, *You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them* (Mark 10:42). This statement rings true still today. We have leaders who base their claims of authority on the power of money or might or intelligence or fame or simply on the power of power itself. But this kind of leadership is all a form of coercion, sometimes overt, sometimes subtle. The greatest leader in human history, though, showed a different way.

2. Servant-Leadership as Proclaimed in the Gospel

When the Son of God entered the world as the son of Mary, he came to demonstrate the consummate form of leadership, a leadership that

would draw first dozens, then hundreds, and now millions and billions of followers.

Jesus Christ came not as a rich man, flashing his cash and pulling strings in Judean society. Rather, he entered our world as the poorest among an impoverished people, as a man with no place to lay his head (Cf. Matthew 8:20).

Jesus Christ came not as a warrior, applying military force of arms to bend the people to His will. Rather, he came as the meekest of all, the Prince of Peace, who declared the wisdom of turning the other cheek (Cf. Matthew 5:39).

Jesus Christ came not as an erudite scribe or fantastic scholar, dazzling the masses with his erudition and oratory. Rather, He spoke in simple words and familiar images that even an unlettered farm boy could understand.

Jesus Christ came not as one of the celebrity sages so common in the ancient world. Rather, He walked among the Jews as their Messiah, but secretly, and He forbade people from telling others of His wondrous works (cf. Mark 1:44, 3:12, 4:42, 7:36, 8:30, 9:9).

Jesus Christ came not as a political insider or as pretender to any throne, wheeling and dealing, as politicians are wont to do. Rather, the son of David came into this world as the son of a simple young woman from an insignificant place in Palestine; as a servant, humble and lowly.

In the Church of Jesus Christ, therefore, none may exert leadership by compulsion of body, mind, or soul. There must be no bribery or flattery, no influence-peddling or arm-twisting, no character assassination or blackmail or boycotts. Compulsion is not God's way of working.

This truth was embodied literally in the Servant Leadership of our Lord Jesus Christ. In Holy Week we commemorate the Institution of the Mystical Supper, a meal that begin with a washing of the feet, the *Nipter*, performed by the Lord Himself (John 13:3-17). As the Head of the banquet, it was not technically His responsibility to kneel before the guests' dusty feet, to wash them in a basin and dry them with a towel. This was the job

of a servant; and not just any servant, but the lowliest one in the household. John's Gospel then says (John 13:12-17):

When he had washed their feet, and taken his garments, and resumed his place, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.

This washing of feet is emblematic of every menial and unpleasant task that a Christian might undertake. If our Savior can bend down to clean dirty feet, what job in the Church dare we deem to be beneath our dignity? Among those who are brothers and sisters in Christ, who dares to demand or compel service from another? Let the spirit be in us that was in the One who said, *The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many* (Matthew 20:28).

Thus, in Christ's ministry we see Him reaching out not to the favored few, the high and mighty. We see Him ministering to the weak, touching the untouchables, helping the helpless. His ministry was first of all to the lowliest and the loneliest, to the most heartbroken and hopeless. His ministry, in other words, was to those that many people refuse to serve or to consort with.

The forms of Christ's service are listed in Matthew 4:23. Jesus went throughout Galilee, ...

διδάσκων ἐν ταῖς συναγωγαῖς αὐτῶν
καὶ κηρύσσων τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τῆς βασιλείας
καὶ θεραπεύων πᾶσαν νόσον καὶ πᾶσαν μαλακίαν ἐν τῷ λαῷ.

Which is to say, Christ was going through towns and villages:

*teaching in their synagogues,
proclaiming the good news of the kingdom,*

and healing every disease and infirmity among the people.

He was a traveling teacher and herald and healer. But he performed these tasks for no pay. He gave to the people freely, asking nothing in return except their repentance towards God. He offered His blessings readily, even in the face of opposition, ingratitude, and abusive words and deeds. When He was cursed, He blessed and He prayed for His abusers (Cf. 1 Peter 2:23). He worked among the people tirelessly, to the point of great hunger, great thirst, and exhaustion. His ministry was a total revolution.

It was a ministry, in other words, like no ministry before or since. Of His own free will, Jesus Christ walked mile after dusty mile to serve others with the intensity of a slave under the lash. His was a ministry not only in word and miracle, but equally a ministry in sweat and blood, from the very beginning, even before the Cross. In preaching the Gospel to the Gentiles of Caesarea, the Apostle Peter sums up Christ's diakonia in these words: [Jesus] διῆλθεν εὐεργετῶν και ἰώμενος. *He went about doing good and healing* (Acts 10:38). Others rise up to dominate their fellow man, but Jesus Christ stoops to conquer, leading men and women back to God through selfless acts of service and mercy.

3. Servant Leadership: Then and Now

This paradigm of Servant Leadership was a new and clearly revolutionary teaching; never before had such a ministry been witnessed in the world. It was more than a mere theory; it was a practice that was perfectly embodied in the person of Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God.

It has often been said that "the medium is the message." In this saying there is a golden kernel of truth. For us today, this means that Servant Leadership is at the heart of the Gospel. It is this Gospel that has spread all over the world, in spite of the fact that Servant Leadership is not the preference of a fallen and corrupted world.

But can we see Servant Leadership still be an effective reality today? It is no revelation to any of us for someone to say that worldly methods of leadership have entered even the life of the Church. Sometimes we see

among ourselves the same inclinations towards plutocracy, celebrity worship, and playing politics. How can we expect the gracious and highly dignified ways of Servant Leadership to compete with these other methods that seem so effective in getting things done, in making the proverbial trains run on time?

We must hold before ourselves and follow always the example of the Lord Jesus Christ: His *will* to serve, His *determination* to serve, His *readiness* for sacrifice. What would drive Him in His ministry to work like a servant and to be executed like a slave? *It was for the joy set before Him*, as the epistle to the Hebrews says (12:2): the joy of leading the people into the perfect peace of the Kingdom of Heaven, the joy of bringing sons and daughters back to the Father, the joy of healing and repairing every wound the evil inflicted upon God's Creation.

In Christ's understanding, who is a leader? The one who bring others into the Kingdom of God. Who is a servant? The one who lays down his life for his friends, the one who relinquishes his soul in this world, that he may find it again in God's Kingdom. By Christ's definition, "Servant Leader" is not an oxymoron, not a contradiction; it is very nearly a redundancy. The servant is as active and decisive as the leader; the leader as humble and self-denying as the servant. To be great and first according to Jesus Christ is to be a real servant: *But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave* (Mark 10:43-44).

The goal of the Servant Leader is principally to bring souls to God, in thanksgiving and repentance and love. Compulsion, domineering tactics and oppression techniques cannot do this. Servanthood alone can accomplish this spiritual mission.

I would like to close with an interesting relevant statistic. If you go thorough the New Testament from A to Z, from the Gospel of Matthew to the Book of Revelation, and count how many times the word *servant* appears in these texts, you would be amazed. The word servant in English translates the original Greek word of the New Testament διάκονος and in many cases the word δούλος and the word ὑπηρέτης. These three words

for the English word servant, namely διάκονος, δοῦλος, and ὑπηρέτης and their derivatives appear in an astonishing number in the New Testament: approximately 300! The New Testament is a rather small book, yet on almost every page you encounter the word *servant* or the verb *to serve*. This is very significant if we ascertain that important words, words like *faith* or *prayer* appear in smaller numbers than the word *servant* or the verb *to serve*. The word *faith* appears approximately 200 times. Likewise, the word *prayer* in the whole New Testament, is encountered about 200 times! The very impressive 300 occurrences is characteristic of the *servant* terminology. The only parallel in frequency of terms in the New Testament is the word *love* or the verb *to love*. These occur more than 300 times. So think of the combination: more than 300 times for *love/to love* and approximately 300 times for *servant/to serve*. The terms *love/to love* and *serve/to serve* are predominant in frequency in the New Testament. This says it all: even above *faith* and above *prayer* is the call to serve, to be the servant, following Christ the initiator and supreme example of Servant Leadership.

My beloved people,

Today we begin a work of Servant Leadership in this Sabor Assembly. Let us put aside the power of the world and its riches and fame and forces of coercion. Let us proclaim the Gospel, teach the way of Christ, bring healing of body and soul to the afflicted—follow in the footsteps of the Lord. Embrace the way of sacrifice and service, and so find Christ, working in us and through us, unto the glory of God and the salvation of His people. Amen.