

Homily by Hieromonk John Maximovich upon his  
Election as Bishop of Shanghai, 1934



*Photo of St. John Maximovich at the Time of his Election as Bishop of Shanghai  
(1934)*

## **Sermon of Hieromonk John (Maximovich) on his election as Bishop of Shanghai**

<http://www.pravoslavie.ru/english/54596.htm>

*St. John of Shanghai*

**Your Beatitude, Eminence Archpastors:**

“Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men” (Matthew 4:19), said

the Lord, summoning His first disciples. I did not imagine in my earliest childhood that this call would be addressed to me, though from the first, I knew that I wished to serve the truth. My parents kindled within me the desire to stand firmly for the truth, and my soul was captured by the examples of those who sacrificed their lives for it, struggling against kings when they persecuted the faith of salvation, struggling for kings when they were the bearers and protectors of piety.

I had a poor understanding of the path I needed to follow. As I grew, I thought to devote myself to the military or to civil service of my Fatherland, which was then the bastion and preserver of true piety. I enrolled in a school devoted to one of the most glorious pages of Russian history (Peter's Poltava Cadet Corps), but felt that I had another calling. This was supported by my friendship with my teacher, Protopriest Sergei Chetverikov, and the Rector of the seminary, now Archbishop Varlaam.

The day I graduated high school happened to be the day the new hierarch assumed his cathedra in the city I was to receive my higher education (now Metropolitan Anthony, then Archbishop of Kharkov), who became forever the guide of my spiritual life. Having learned the academic sciences, I immersed myself more and more in the science of sciences, the study of the spiritual life.

The monastery where this archpastor lived and the Church had a greater attraction for me than the school where I learned the civil sciences.

The collapse of state power in our Fatherland finally convinced me that all that is of this earth is temporal, and that the power and abilities of mankind are weak, and I decided to forsake the fuss and bother of earthly life, dedicating myself solely to the service of God.

But service to God, which was summoning my soul with authority to "deny myself, and take up my cross, and follow Him" (Matthew 16:24, Mark 9:24), at the same time instilled the inner obligation to become a

fisher of men. Even before my external bonds with the lay world were sundered, the thirst for theological knowledge drew me to a school dedicated to the great St Savva, and then to the path he showed.

Today, by the mouths of the Archpastors of the Church, I am called upon to take on the archpastoral service. I dare not think myself worthy of this rank, acknowledging my sinfulness, but I fear rejecting this call, heeding the words of the Lord addressed to the sinning but repentant Peter: “If thou lovest me, feed my sheep, feed my lambs.” St John Chrysostom, explaining this passage from the Gospel, points out that in proof of love for the Lord, He did not demand anything but the podvig of being a pastor. Why is the pastoral service so important in the eyes of the Lord? Because pastors, as Paul said, are “laborers together with God” (1 Corinthians 3:9). Christ came to earth to restore the tarnished image of God in man, to summon mankind, to unite them in a single person, to glorify with one mouth and one heart his Creator. The challenge of every pastor is to draw people towards this unity, so that he is born again and sanctified. What can be greater than to reestablish the creation of God? What greater good can be brought to one’s neighbor than to prepare him for life eternal? This challenge is not easy to meet—one must struggle against the nature of man which is spoiled by sin. One often faces misunderstanding, sometimes intentional resistance and hatred from those who you love and care for. The selflessness of the pastor must be great, and great must be the love for his flock. He must be prepared to endure all for their sake, and every lamb must find a place in his heart, to each he must apply the necessary healing, as determined by the character and circumstance of each.

However difficult and complicated are the duties of a simple pastor and however great his responsibility is for the salvation of his flock, how much more is one to say about an archpastor? Truly, the words of the Lord are addressed to him, spoken once to the Prophet Ezekiel: “Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel” (Ezekiel 3:17).

The archpastor is responsible not only for all the lambs entrusted to him by God, but for his pastors as well. He will answer for every sinner whom he could not bring to wisdom, for each who commenced on the road of truth but then strayed. His duty is to suffer the ailments of his sheep and thereby heal them, as did the Chief Pastor, Christ, “with His stripes we are healed” (Isaiah 53:5). He has no personal life, for he must give himself over fully to the task of saving human souls and leading them to the Kingdom of Heaven. He must be prepared to endure all wrath, persecutions and even death for the sake of the truth, to drink from the cup of Christ and to be baptized with His baptism (Matthew 20:23; Mark 10:39). He must tend not only to those who come to him, but to seek out and return wayward sheep, carrying them upon his shoulders. His task is to declare the teachings of Christ to those who do not know Him, remembering the commandment of the Lord: “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15). Infused with the cognizance of the universal Church, the pastor cannot limit himself to tending only to those who is entrusted to him, but must gaze upon the universal Church of Christ with his spiritual eyes, desiring to illuminate all peoples and desiring their success in the true faith, for in the Church “there is neither Jew nor Greek, neither bond nor free” but all are children in equal love of the Father in Heaven.

Tending to the salvation of men, one must adapt to their sensibilities; in order to attract each one, emulating Apostle Paul, one must be able to also say: “And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law; to them that are without law, as without law, (being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ,) that I might gain them that are without law. To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some” (1 Corinthians 21-22).

Tending to the salvation of human souls, one must remember that people have physical needs which make themselves abundantly apparent. One cannot preach the Gospel without exhibiting love in deed. But one must take care that tending to the physical needs of one's neighbor does not consume all the attention of the pastor and does not serve to hinder his care for their spiritual needs, remembering the words of the Apostles: "It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables" (Acts 6:2). Everything must be directed towards gaining the Kingdom of Heaven and the fulfillment of the Gospel of Christ. True Christianity does not consist of abstract pondering and teachings, but is incorporated into life. Christ came to earth not to simply teach the people new knowledge, but to summon them to new life. In earthly life we prepare for eternal life. The circumstances and events of temporal life influence the spiritual life of man. Those who are firm in character overcome the influence of their surroundings, while the weak succumb to them. The strong in spirit are stoked under persecution, the feeble fall. That is why to the extent possible one must establish conditions under which the greatest number of people gain spiritual edification.

The pastor cannot stray from participating in social life, but must participate in his capacity of the bearer of the laws of Christ and a representative of the Church. A clergyman cannot turn into a simple political or social activist, forgetting the main essence of his service, and his task. The kingdom "is not of this world" (John 18:36), and Christ did not establish an earthly kingdom. Refraining from becoming a political leader and avoiding partisan conflicts, the pastor can cast spiritual light upon the phenomena of this world, so that his flock could know the way to which to adhere, and would be Christians in both their personal and their social lives. The archpastor must be able to give each person spiritual counsel: the hermit monk purifying his soul from idle thoughts, and the sovereign king, and the general going to war, and the common

citizen. This is especially necessary for a pastor of the Russian Church, the fate of which is closely bound to events in our Homeland.

Few Russians have remained untouched by the phenomena which profoundly rock the soul of anyone pondering them. Can one remain indifferent seeing that the bitter words of Prophet Isaiah have been manifested over the holy Kremlin: “How is the faithful city become a harlot! it was full of judgment; righteousness lodged in it; but now murderers” (Isaiah 1:24). What believing soul is not shocked by the desecration of holy things and of persecutions unheard of! All the sons of Russia one way or another sense the breath of the red beast assailing the Bride of Christ.

Christians from the first centuries endured persecutions for Christ, but they never rejoiced in them, but raised their voices against them. Many apologists and martyrs denounced the persecutors in the first centuries, and a great host of hierarchs and confessors followed their example. In peaceful times, hierarchs and podvizhniki instruct, in wicked times, they denounce those wielding power. Russia was built under the direct influence of her great pastors and people of prayer. We cannot but grieve seeing the destruction of the great house of the Mother of God, which the Russian sovereignty was once called. We cannot but feel the pain when the souls and bodies of our neighbors are being torn, when fear of death forces the silence of our archpastors and pastors in our Homeland. Even outside the borders of Russia we remain her sons. Exiled from our earthly Fatherland, we continue to be the spiritual flock of the Holy Patriarchs Peter, Alexei, Jonah, Filipp and Ermogen. We remain a part of the Russian Church, suffering and persecuted, drenched in the blood of Hieromartyrs Vladimir of Kiev, Veniamin of Petrograd, Germogen of Tobolsk, Mitrofan of Astrakhan, Andronik of Perm and an uncounted number of other New Martyrs and Confessors. Their legacy is what we hold sacred, which we must preserve until the time when God grants that His power be revealed and the horn of Orthodox Christians resounds.

Until then we must remain in spiritual unity with the persecuted, strengthening them through prayer.

We kiss their bonds from afar, we grieve over those who faltered. We know that sometimes the ancient confessors of the truth also faltered. But we have epitomes of staunchness: Theodore the Studite, who denounced apostasy from the truth of the Church, the example of Maxim the Confessor, that of Patriarch Ermogen.

Let us fear straying from the paths they took, for if those suffering under the present yoke are justified by human weakness, what shall we say if we fear only threats? Living in relative safety, we must be strong in spirit in order to rebuild what was destroyed, if the Lord deems fit “to deliver Zion from bondage,” in order to follow in the footsteps of those who suffered for truth, if the need arises. For this first and foremost must we preserve unity in mind and spirit, representing the one Russian Church, and at the same time carry out the great mission among other nations. From the very first centuries of Christianity in Russia, preachers have gone out to remote lands. Glorified at the beginning were SS Kuksha, Leonty of Rostov, later Stefan of Perm, Innokenty of Irkutsk, and closer to our times, Makary, Apostle of Altai, and Nicholas of Japan. Now the scattered Russian people have become the missionaries of faith to all the ends of the earth. The challenge of the Russian Church Abroad is to illuminate as many people as possible from all the nations.

For the sake of this goal, the Synod of the Russian Church Abroad is sending me to a country whence the physical Sun rises, but which is need of illumination by the spiritual Sun of Truth.

I admit my feeble powers; from obedience to my church hierarchy and my spiritual leader, I submit to this election not for honor and power, but giving myself over to serving the Church.

I pray the Lord God that He helps me and strengthens me unto death to labor for the truth.

On this great day, I pray for those who educated me and guided me with their words and example, I pray for those among whom my ecclesial service has thus far been performed, for the youth whom I educated, for my future flock, for the Ecumenical Church, for the suffering Russian Land! I rely on the prayers and intercession of the great host of heavenly defenders of the Christian peoples.

I ask you also, Hierarchs of God, and from afar, I ask my Archpastor, Bishop Viktor, to pray for me and to grant me God's blessing.

*Belgrade, May 27, 1934.*