

On the Occasion of the Commemoration and
Centennial of the Repose
(†February 14/27,1915)

of St. Raphael the Syrian, Bishop of Brooklyn, a Great Missionary and Early Anti-Ecumenist 1860-1915

St. Raphael was born in 1860 in Syria [according to other sources, in Beirut, Lebanon] to pious parents, Michael Hawaweeny and his wife, Mariam, who was the daughter of a Priest in Damascus.

Owing to the violent persecution of the Christians at that time, during which the family's parish Priest and spiritual Father, St. Joseph of Damascus (†July 10, 1860), was martyred, the family fled to Beirut.

They returned to Damascus in 1861. The young Raphael showed great aptitude in his studies, and he was recommended to Patriarch Hierotheos of Antioch (1850-1884) as a candidate for the Priesthood. He studied at the Patriarchate and was such a talented student that, in 1877, he was appointed Assistant Professor.

On March 28, 1879, he was tonsured a monk by Patriarch Hierotheos, who took him into his personal service.

Since the seminary of Balamand had been closed since 1840, the Ecumenical Patriarchate, under Patriarch Joachim III (1878-1884), offered a scholarship for a Syrian student, and Raphael was chosen to complete his studies at the Theological School at Halke.

He was ordained a Deacon there (December 8, 1885), and returned home the following year with a degree in theology.

The new Patriarch of Antioch, Gerasimos (1884-1891), took him with him on his pastoral visitations, and asked him to preach to the people when he was unable to be present in person.

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Since he thirsted for further education, the better to serve the Holy Orthodox Church, Deacon Raphael was sent to the Theological Acad-





amy of Kiev for his post-graduate education.

Metropolitan Ioannikios of Moscow ordained him a Priest and raised him to the rank of Archimandrite, and he was put in charge of the Patriarchate of Antioch's Church in the Russian capital (1889).

He managed to reduce the Church's debts a great deal and obtained scholarships for twenty-four Syrian students.

When Patriarch Gerasimos was transferred to Jerusalem, Archimandrite Raphael contended for an Arabic-speaking Hierarch to replace him on the Throne of Antioch, for which he was reprimanded by the Œcumenical Patriarch Spyridon (1891-1898), a Cypriot.

He was suspended from his Priestly functions, but continued to write in favor of the Arabization of the See of Antioch in Russian periodicals and then in books. He was ultimately reconciled with the Patriarch, asked forgiveness, and was restored to the ministry.

He was transferred to the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Moscow and was appointed Professor of Arabic Studies at the Theological Academy of Kazan.

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Archimandrite Raphael had a missionary outlook and zeal in his ministry to the people of God. He was distinguished for his spirit of self-abnegation and self-sacrifice in his ecclesiastical ministry.

In 1895, at the invitation of the Benevolent Society of Syrian Orthodox of New York, he left for the United States, where he arrived on November 2, 1895, in order to take charge of the Arab Orthodox community of New York, which had neither a place of worship nor a Priest. On the first Sunday after his arrival (November 5), he liturgized with Bishop Nicholas at the Russian Church in New York City.

Two weeks later, he set up a chapel dedicated to St. Nicholas in lower Manhattan, with the blessing of Bishop Nicholas of the Russian Church, which at that time was the only Orthodox jurisdiction in America, with its See in San Francisco.

With all his strength, he preached and celebrated the Divine Liturgy for his parishioners, also showing great concern for the many Arab

Christian immigrants scattered across North America.

These faithful, for want of a pastor, were in danger of being absorbed by the other Christian confessions or even of abandoning all religious life.

Well aware of how greatly the teachings of the heterodox diverged from the doctrine transmitted by Holy Tradition, he forbade the faithful from attending the services of those of other confessions.

Between 1896 and 1899, he made three pastoral journeys across the continent, seeking, as a Good Shepherd, the scattered sheep and creating places of worship for the celebration of the Divine services.

He celebrated the Divine Liturgy and the Mysteries for all of the Orthodox, whether Greek, Russian, or Arab—at that time all of the Orthodox Christians in the United States depended on the Russian mission—restored peace and harmony to all of the communities that he visited, and, with the blessing of Bishop Nicholas, invited qualified Priests from Syria in order to serve in the Arab-speaking parishes that he had founded, and sought out educated laymen for ordination.

Strict towards himself, he was always benevolent, merciful, and full of love for his faithful, who came to him with their difficulties, approaching him as a genuine Shepherd of Christ.

After the election of Metropolitan Meletios as Patriarch of Antioch (1899-1916), the Metropolitan of Beirut proposed to make him his Assistant Bishop, but Raphael refused, so as not to abandon his flock in the United States. It was with great joy, however, that the Saint announced to his people that, for the first time in 168 years, a native Arab had been chosen as Primate of the Church of Antioch.

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In December of 1901, Archimandrite Raphael was elected Bishop of Zahlé, Lebanon, but he again declined to return to the Middle East. He wished to complete the project of building a parish Church for the Syrian community of New York.

The following year, he was able to buy an existing church building on Pacific Street in Brooklyn and had it remodeled for Orthodox worship. To the great joy of the faithful, Bishop Tikhon—the successor of Bishop Nicholas





in America and future Patriarch of Moscow, venerated as a Saint by the Orthodox Church († March 25, 1925)—consecrated it as the Cathedral of St. Nicholas.

St. Tikhon had been elected Bishop at the age of thirty-two and was sent to North America, where he developed extensive missionary activities, founding more than fifty-five parishes, one monastery, and one seminary.

The number of Orthodox parishes within the Diocese of North America was growing, and it was impossible for Bishop Tikhon to meet all of the various pastoral needs of such a large and multi-ethnic flock.

Thus, he proposed to the Holy Synod in Russia the transfer of his See from San Francisco to New York, and the Consecration of Archimandrite Raphael as his second Assistant Bishop, with care of the Arab communities. Bishop Innocent of Alaska had already been elected and consecrated as his first Assistant Bishop.

In 1903, the proposal was unanimously accepted, and on the Third Sunday of Great Lent in 1904, Archimandrite Raphael was consecrated Bishop of Brooklyn, concelebrating with Bishops Tikhon and Innocent at the Cathedral of St. Nicholas in Brooklyn. The new bishop's vestments were a gift from Tsar Nicholas II, the future Royal-Martyr († July 4, 1918).

This was the first consecration of an Orthodox Bishop on American soil.

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After his consecration, Bishop Raphael retained direction of the Syro-Arab Orthodox Mission in North America.

With redoubled zeal, he continued his pastoral labors, ordaining Priests for the parishes and helping Bishop Tikhon in the administration of his immense Diocese.

In January of 1905, he began publishing a periodical called *Al-Kalimat* (The Word) as the official publication of the Syro-Arab Mission, with the aim of communicating with, informing, and catechizing the communities scattered over the American continent. He regarded this publication as a milestone in his missionary activities, of equal importance to the acquisition of the Cathedral of St. Nicholas (1902) in

Brooklyn and the cemetery (1901) on Long Island.

In July of 1905, Bishop Raphael laid the foundation of the Monastery of Saint Tikhon in South Canaan, Pennsylvania. An orphanage was also built alongside the monastery.

For the next ten years, the holy Shepherd diligently tended his growing flock in New York and showed special concern for the youth. He organized night schools so that children would receive an Orthodox Christian education, since children who did not speak Arabic were going to Sunday School classes in heterodox Churches, where English was spoken.



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He also understood the importance of integrating his communities into American society. Thus, he recommended the use in all of his parishes of the *Service Book of the Holy Orthodox Catholic Apostolic Church*, which had been translated into English.

After Saint Tikhon returned to Russia (March of 1907) and was replaced by Archbishop Platon, Bishop Raphael was nominated in 1908 to succeed Patriarch Gregory as Metropolitan of Tripoli, Syria. The Holy Synod of Antioch rejected his candidature, alleging the canonical prohibition of Episcopal transfers.

On the Sunday of Orthodoxy in 1911, Bishop Raphael was honored for his fifteen years of pastoral ministry in North America. Archbishop Platon presented him with a silver-plated Icon of Christ and praised him for his multifaceted and arduous pastoral work. In his humility, Bishop Raphael considered himself an unworthy servant of the Lord and could not understand why he should be honored for merely doing his duty.

Toward the end of 1912, Bishop Raphael was diagnosed with a heart disease, but that did not prevent him from undertaking pastoral journeys during the next two years.

In 1915, worn out at last by his labours, he fell ill again, retired to his house, and, after two months of illness patiently borne with thanksgiving, faith in God, and prayer, he fell asleep in the Lord on February 14/27, 1915.

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The Holy Bishop Raphael was, and continues to be, a model Orthodox Shepherd and missionary, who sacrificed himself on behalf of his flock.

When he arrived in America in November of 1895, at the age of thirty-five, he had to minister to a divided flock scattered throughout the United States, Canada, and Mexico.

By the end of his twenty-year ministry, the Syro-Arab Mission had thirty parishes with 25,000 faithful.

He kept his flock unharmed from the danger of converting to heterodox Christian confessions and protected them from every spiritual harm.

He was a learned man and the author of numerous books, and many of his articles were published in the periodical *The Word*.

In addition to Arabic, he was fluent in English, Russian, and Greek.

With perspicacity, he permitted the use of the English language in the Divine Liturgy and in educational programs.

He communicated with Orthodox of every nationality and race, speaking to them in their mother tongue.

He was for all a gentle father; he gained their love and respect by his outstanding personality and excellent character; he was always kind, merciful, and understanding with others, but strict with himself; he served God and his fellow man with a spirit of self-sacrifice.



The faithful immediately and spontaneously venerated him as a Saint of the Orthodox Church.

The sacred relics of St. Raphael were found to be partially incorrupt when they were translated from New York to Antiochian Village, near Ligonier, Pennsylvania, where they are preserved to this day as a source of healings.



UNTO OUR ALL-HOLY TRIUNE GOD,
WHO IS GLORIFIED IN HIS SAINTS,
BE WORSHIP AND THANKSGIVING,
UNTO THE AGES OF AGES.
AMEN!