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BY THE GRACE OF GOD
BISHOP OF EASTERN AMERICA
THE SERBIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH

Most beloved Clergy and Monastics, Sons and Daughters,
faithful Children of the Diocese of Eastern America of our most holy Church,
with abounding joy emanating from a paternal heart,
We greet you on this most radiant and most auspicious occasion
in our collective history, both sacred and secular:

**THE 800TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE AUTOCEPHALY
OF THE SERBIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH
1219 – 2019**

Endowed by God, Treasured by the People

Dearly beloved, Heaven and Earth rejoice with us during this Jubilee Year of our Autocephaly!

For the Sun of the East has kissed the soil of the West and the profound faith of Saint Sava, indeed, our Orthodox Christian faith, incarnate in our Serbian Lands and preserved through our unique culture and tradition, has been firmly planted here, in these United States of America. An ancient faith has blossomed in a new land, thus fulfilling the providential words of our Savior, "Behold, I make all things new!" (Rev. 21:5).

In anticipation of that newness of life, our young Prince Rastko, or Rastislav, literally, the one who "increases glory", left the courts of his father, the Grand Prince Stephan Nemanya, and took to flight seeking monasticism and enlightenment on Holy Mount Athos. Subsequently, the fulfillment of his sojourn was revealed in the transfigured person of our glorious Enlightener and Teacher, Saint Sava, the First Archbishop of the Serbian Lands and the Littoral.

The year was 1219. Eight hundred years ago archimandrite Sava, together with a group of learned and distinguished monastics, set sail for Nicaea, the then See of the Byzantine Empire and the Patriarchate of Constantinople. Departing from Hilandar Monastery, in translation, "The Boatman", Sava sought ecclesiastical independence for the Orthodox Church, which had firmly taken root in our Serbian Lands, and in so doing to fully secure nationhood for the newly incepted Serbian Kingdom.

Domentian, one of Sava's biographers, stresses a pivotal point, noting that our Autocephaly is truly providential. For it was divinely revealed to the august Emperor of Byzantium, Theodore I

Laskaris, even before the princely monk Sava arrived in Nicaea, that he should be consecrated and not, as Sava desired, another from among those in his accompaniment. As such, the Emperor, outside the customary bounds of Imperial Protocol, leaves his palatial center and awaits Sava's arrival before the city gates to personally usher him into The City of the First and Seventh Ecumenical Councils.

Thus, consecrated as the First Archbishop of Serbia on the Great Feast of the Dormition of the Theotokos in 1219, Domentian espouses yet another telling detail. As a particular honor bestowed upon Sava at the time of his Consecration, Patriarch Manuel I of Constantinople vested the new Archbishop in his own patriarchal vestments, which, indeed, differed from those of other bishops, clearly pointing to the rank and authority now invested in Sava of Serbia.

Sava's zeal for good estate of his Church is seen in the wake of his Consecration. According to Theodosius, another biographer, instead of making haste to assume his Throne and establish his See, Sava visits his close friend Michael, Metropolitan of Thessaloniki, as he possessed a substantial library of spiritual and legal books. Sava spent months translating the same, before heading for his Cathedra in Zhicha Monastery. Thus, prepared for the edification of his faithful and the establishing of ecclesiastical order, Sava plants himself on the Way of Life, as a fruitful Olive Tree. The fullness of the Way of Saint Sava—*Svetosavlje* is, thereby, neither isolated nor lifeless, rather our common and living Orthodox Christian inheritance.

Immigrating to the United States of America, our Serbian people brought with them an acute awareness of their Orthodox faith and Serbian heritage. Coupled with the freedom of religion, which they encountered, they hastened to erect churches and in such lay the very foundations for their collective new home and life. The first Serbian Orthodox church in America was built in 1894 in Jackson, California, under the patronage of the venerable archimandrite Sebastian (Dabovich), the first Orthodox priest born in America to an expatriate family. The church was raised by the hands of Serbian miners from the West Coast, who dedicated their new temple to Saint Sava.

Relying on his abiding protection, Serbian immigrants prayed in anticipation of the continued growth of their fledgling communities in the United States. Subsequently, a church was erected in Galveston, Texas, and by 1919, another 30 churches had been established in the states of Pennsylvania, Alaska, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Kansas, Montana and Ohio, as well as Canada. Prior to the establishment of a Serbian Diocese in America and Canada in 1921, our parishes were under the temporary jurisdiction of the Russian Orthodox Metropolia, likened unto young Rastko, who was received and tonsured in the Russian Athonite Monastery of St. Panteleimon.

Bishop Nicholai (Velimirovich) was appointed administrator of the nascent Serbian Diocese in North America, whose formation he advocated in 1921. He was succeeded by St. Mardary (Uskokovich), a man of unparalleled vision and sacrifice, who became the first Bishop of the American and Canadian Diocese of the Serbian Orthodox Church in 1923. He would erect the first Serbian Orthodox monastery in the United States, in Libertyville, Illinois. This monastery, dedicated to Saint Sava, initially served as an orphanage, and rapidly became the spiritual epicenter of our entire Church on this Continent.

Following suit, individuals such as Nikola Tesla and Mihajlo Idvorski Pupin, as well as many other remarkable figures in American society, significantly secured the foundations of the Serbian-American community. Mihajlo Pupin, to whom the personality of Saint Sava served as an inspiration in his scientific work, exemplified himself as a great benefactor of Saint Sava Monastery in Libertyville. In New York, the holy Bishop Nicholai established the Serbian Bible

Institute. In 1951, as a prolific author, he published *The Life of Saint Sava* in the English language. In the words of Professor Veselin Kesich, “an account of an unusual saint, written by an unusual bishop”.

Historically attributed to Saint Sava, through one of his contemporary bishops named Irinej, “we are considered to be East by the West and West by the East, while we belong neither to the East nor the West, but only to the Heavenly Jerusalem”. This is our particular Serbian and common Orthodox ethos, our creative might of interaction with the world and our unique contribution to contemporary society, which is no longer merely East or West. The same must become in unity, “a harmony of elevated emotion, intellect and will power”, according to the holy Bishop Nicholai. For aptly, in describing America, he noted:

“The light of the East and the light of the West will rest at their noon on the continent, which lies between East and West. . .”

In that very light, Lord, make us worthy to behold Your Light, in order to fulfil St. Nicholai’s prayerful admonishment of American church leaders in 1921 to “make plans as large as the world and efforts as hard as those of the apostles”; “to prepare for a sacrifice as holy and as universal as Yours”. For in these troubled times, only exalted endeavors, issuing forth from a strong faith, will be able to sustain those who are apprehensive, ever heeding the directives of Ecumenical Patriarch Manuel I in the *Grammaton* issued to the newly consecrated Archbishop Sava:

**“LISTEN TO HIM, ALL OF YOU WHO ARE IN CHRIST,
TRUE BELIEVING CHRISTIANS!”**

Given in New York, at the Indiction of the New Ecclesiastical Year

YOUR HUMBLE INTERCESSOR BEFORE THE THRONE OF SAINT SAVA,

BISHOP OF EASTERN AMERICA
THE SERBIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH