

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

Metropolitan Joseph

My Life in Christ Youth Conference

July 12-17, 2011, Boston, MA

Dearly Beloved Fr. Philip Tolbert and all participants in our 2011 BOYA Conference,

Welcome to Boston, MA!

Welcome to "My Life in Christ" Youth Conference!

Thank you for your invitation to open the 2011 MLIC Conference and according to our tradition to bless it with my attendance and the following words.

In my opening speech I would like to stop your attention and ask all of you not to allow other people to talk you out of using what God has given you and doing what you know God wants you to do.

If you are not careful, you will allow the negative words to play over and over in your minds. They can create a stronghold.

Regardless of who has spoken negative words into your life - a parent, a spouse, a coach, a friend, or a teacher - you must cast those words down. Words are powerful. They can create barriers in your heart and mind. Sometimes one little phrase can hold you back for years. Hear what happened with me 30 years ago in Bulgaria. His Holiness our Patriarch Maxim, who was 67 years old then, invited me to visit our Troyan monastery. A man came to me and wanted the Patriarch to pray for him. I told the man: "Sir, I'm sorry, but the Patriarch can't be disturbed at this time. He's resting and getting prepared for the service tonight and tomorrow."

But this man refused to take no for an answer. He was extremely aggressive and determined. I remained kind and courteous, trying to placate the unexpected visitor. But the caller continued to press.

Finally, I said: "Sir, how about this? I will pray for you. I work with His Holiness every day. I'll be glad to pray for you."

At that, the obnoxious man turned his nose up. He said: "I don't think so. You won't do."

The words stung: "You won't do." The implicit message was: "You are not good enough. Your prayers can't get the job done."

Truly to say those words seared through my heart and mind day after day. "You won't do." Lying in bed at night, I'd think: "You don't have what it takes. You're not anointed like the Patriarch."

You can't help a soul."

Indeed, I already struggled with my confidence, but even now I was allowing these negative words to play repeatedly in my subconscious mind. I couldn't shake them off, and instead allowed those negative words to hold me down for years.

Too many people don't have the confidence and the self-esteem they should because they're constantly dwelling on negative thoughts about themselves. I don't say this arrogantly, but in my mind, all day long I try to remind myself: "I am anointed, I am successful, I have the favor of God!"

If you go around thinking those kinds of thoughts, low self-esteem, lack of confidence, or infirmity won't have a chance with you. Throw your shoulders back, put a smile on your face, and be looking for opportunities to stretch into the next level.

Back in the Garden of Eden, after Adam and Eve ate the forbidden food, they hid. In the cool of the day, God came to them and said: "Adam..., where art thou? And he said: I heard Thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself."(Gen. 3:9-10)

I love the way God answered Adam. "And He said: Who told thee that thou wast naked?"(vs. 11)

God is saying to you today: "Who told you that you don't have what it takes to succeed? Who told you that the bad grades you could make in school would be C's rather than A's? Who told you that you are not attractive to succeed in your personal relationships or talented enough to flourish in your career? Who told you that something was wrong with you?"

Those are lies from the enemy. You need to reject those ideas and discover what God says about you.

And what does God says about you? He says: "You can do all things through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. When you delight yourself in Him He will give you the desires of your heart." The Holy Scripture says: "God's gifts and His callings are irrevocable." That means God is never going to take back the potential He has poured into you. But it is up to you to decide whether you tap into them and use them or not.

In the gospel of one of our heavenly patrons St. John the Theologian, chapter 4, the Lord Jesus met a woman at a well in Samaria, and He asked her for a drink of water. She was surprised, because back then, the Jews didn't have anything to do with the Samaritans. She said: "How can You ask me for a drink?" The Lord Jesus said: "If you knew who I was, you would ask Me for a drink, and I would give you living water."

The woman thought that Jesus was talking about literal water. She said: "Sir, You don't even have anything with which to draw water. You don't have a bucket, and the well is deep. How can You possibly give the water?"

I wonder how many times God tells us that He wants to do something great in our lives, that we are going to be healthy and well; we are going to get out of debt. We feel it strongly, but like the woman at the well, we start thinking about what we don't have, and all the obstacles in our path, and before long, we've talked ourselves out of God's best.

This is my request to you - you must quit looking at what you don't have, and start believing that all things are possible. God is not limited to the laws of nature. He can do what human beings cannot. The key is to get your eyes off your problems and onto your God.

When God puts a dream in your heart, it may look impossible in the natural way of things. Every voice may tell you it will never happen. But if you will believe and stay in faith, and expect good things, you too can defy the odds.

I had a friend in Bulgaria, a tightrope walker, who comes from a family of several generations of circus entertainers. I asked him: "What is the key to walking on the tightrope? You make it look so easy?"

He said: "Father Joseph, the secret is to keep your eyes fixed on where you are going. You never look down. Where your head goes, that's where your body is going, too. If you look down, there's a good chance you will fall. So you always have to look to where you want to be."

It's the same principle in life. Some people are always looking back, focus on their hurts and pains. Other people are looking down living in self-pity, and complaining that life is not fair. The key to rising higher is to keep looking to where you want to go. Dream big dreams! Don't focus on where you are today; keep a positive vision and see yourself accomplishing your goals and fulfilling your dreams.

Here's a key: The dream in your heart may be bigger than the environment in which you find yourself. Sometimes you have to get out of that environment in order to see that dream fulfilled. Consider an oak tree. If you plant it in a pot, its growth will be limited. Once its roots fill the pot, it can grow no further. The problem is not with the tree, it is with the environment. It is stifling growth. Perhaps you have bigger things in your heart than your present environment can facilitate. That's why, at times, God will stir you out of a comfortable situation. When you go through persecution and rejection, it's not always because somebody has it in for you. Sometimes, that's God's way of directing you into His perfect will. He's trying to get you to stretch to the next level. He knows you're not going to go without a push, so He will make it uncomfortable for you to stay where you are currently. The mistake we make at times is getting negative and sour; we focus on what didn't work out. When we do that, we inhibit the opening of new doors.

My understanding is that throughout life, we're not always going to understand everything that happens along the way. But we've got to learn to trust God. We've got to believe that He has us in the palm of His hand, that He is leading and guiding us, that He always has our best interest at heart.

In conclusion, I would like to ask you as my friends in the Lord not to die with the treasure still inside you. Keep pressing forward. Keep reaching for new heights. Give birth to what God has

placed in your heart. Don't let other people talk you out of your dreams. Listen to what God says about you, not all the negative voices. When you face rejection and disappointment, don't stay there. Know that God has another plan. That closed door simply means God has something better in store. You may not have experienced God's favor in the past, but this is a new day. You have not seen, heard, or imagined the wonderful things God has in store for you. Don't be weighed down by the distractions and disappointments in life; instead, keep stretching to the next level, reaching for your highest potential. If you do that, I can tell you with confidence your best days are in front of you. God is going to show you more of His blessings and favor, and you will become a better you, better than you ever dreamed possible.

Thank you for your attention!

Have a blessed conference!

"The Lord Jesus Christ be with thy spirit. Grace be with you. Amen." (2 Timothy 4:22)

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