

19/02/2024

HOMILY By His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros of America At the Sunday Divine Liturgy 47th Annual Folk Dance and Choral Festival



My Beloved Brother in Christ, Metropolitan Gerasimos,

Your Grace and Reverend Fathers,

Beloved Children in the Lord,

We read in the Old Testament, in the Second Book of Samuel, that when King David brought up the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem, that he:

... danced before the Lord with all his might.[1]

Even though he was the King, David took off his royal robes and put on the simplest garment of a Levite priest; then he led the Ark into the Holy City with ecstatic and exuberant dancing, while all around him the people were:

... making merry before the Lord with all their might, with songs and lyres and harps and tambourines and castanets and cymbals. [2]

In fact, the King had commenced the procession by playing the harp himself. His excitement and joy got him into a little trouble with his wife, Michal, who was embarrassed by her husband's exhilaration and frenetic energy.[3] She chastised him to his face, because she thought that he had demeaned the high office of King.

David, on the other hand, defended himself, claiming that his joy and ebullience was warranted, because it was the celebration of the presence of God in their midst, Who dwelt in the Ark of the Covenant that Moses had constructed, and which had traveled with the People of Israel in their journeys through the wilderness, and as they came into the Land of Promise.

As I have beheld the sheer joy and enthusiasm of all the performers these past few days, I cannot help but think of King David and his own rapturous dance before the

Ark - before the presence of the Lord. And just as we are celebrating this Divine Liturgy today, I heard these words of the Apostle Paul in today's Epistle:

... you are the temple of the living God; as God said, "I will live in them and move among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.[4]

The People of Israel understood the Ark to be the one, localized place where God could be experienced. That is why David's son, King Solomon, built the Temple that his father desired to build but was never able to.

But we who are Orthodox Christians - who are the New Israel of God - even though we build Houses of Worship and adorn them with all manner of icons, we embody at every moment the "Temple of the Living God," whenever two or three are gathered together in His Holy Name. [5]

We understand the Ark of the Covenant to be a prototype of the Holy Virgin; for she held within her womb the living manifestation of all the contents of the Ark, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ: [6]

1. First, there was the Rod of Moses' brother, Aaron, that budded, prefiguring the Virgin Birth. [7]
2. Then, there were the stone tablets of the Law, delivered to Moses on Mount Sinai, which show that our Lord is the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets. [8]
3. And finally, the golden jar of manna that fed the Israelites in the desert, which foretells that the Lord is the Bread of Heaven - the Bread of life that we receive in every Divine Liturgy. [9]

Therefore, my beloved Christians, when you dance and when you sing, and when you play your instruments "with all your might" as Scripture says, you give praise and glory to the One Who lives and moves among us.

For the Temple of the Living God is now among us and in us, as the Book of Revelation proclaims:

Behold! the tabernacle of God is with humankind, and He shall make His dwelling among them. They shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them. [10]

The wonderful news of this spiritual reality is that wherever we are, there is our God - caring for us and loving us. Such divine love is worthy of our greatest and happiest joy. And from this joy, like King David, we dance. We sing. We clap our hands. We make merry. And we make music.

That is what FDF is truly about. And no one ever needs to be shamed by anyone for their delight and rapture.

Therefore, my beloved brothers and sisters, dance and sing and play your melodies - knowing that you are in the presence of our Holy God, and that the temples of your physical bodies are also the corporate Temple of God, in Whom we live, and move, and have our being.

Amen!

[1] II Samuel 6:14.

[2] II Samuel 6:5.

[3] II Samuel 6:16-23.

[4] II Corinthians 6:16.

[5] Cf. Matthew 18:20.

[6] Hebrews 9:4

[7] Numbers 17:8.

[8] Cf. Matthew 22:35-40.

[9] Cf. John 6:35-40.

[10] Revelation 21:3.

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