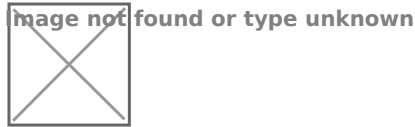


Remarks By Archbishop Elpidophoros of America At the Community Gala of Saint Demetrios Greek Orthodox Church



Protopresbyter Miltiades,

Parish Council President Athanasios Jouvanis,

Philoptochos President Athena Cavanos,

Beloved Faithful,

The tenth anniversary of your parish fills this Metropolis of New Jersey and our Sacred Archdiocese with much joy and spiritual gladness. You have accomplished so much in a really short period of time. Tonight's Community Gala is a worthy celebration of your many successes and progress to date, and it gives pause to reflect on what opportunities the decades to come will offer.

Williamsburg is a historical icon of the colonial period, especially here in Virginia. It embodies much of what is best in the colonization of America by the British, in the decades leading up to the War of Independence – the Revolution that established the United States of America. But we all know that this same history had its shadow-side, if you will. The forced removal and even elimination of Indigenous People, as well as the enslavement of Africans – the dual original sins of America.

These are hard realities to accept, and we see around us in our own day that their effects are still being felt and dealt with.

That is why your parish is so important. Because our Orthodox Faith, the most authentic and realistic unfolding of the Lord's Gospel – exemplified in our theology and worship – is a healing balm for our unique American challenges.

I know that we are a very small minority here in America. But we have a responsibility to the culture that surrounds us – no matter what its character is. Take heart in these two sayings of our Lord. First:

Μὴ φοβοῦ τὸ μικρὸν ποίμνιον.

Let the little flock not be afraid. *

This saying has always been of great comfort to me, especially as I was born in Constantinople, where our Greek Orthodox community is now very few in number. But we were one community in Christ, under the loving eye of our father in Christ, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew. This binds us in hope and confidence. The same is true here in Williamsburg as well. You have manifested the promise of the Church here in this place, and, as such, you become the living expression of this second saying of our Lord:

To what shall I liken the Kingdom of God? It is like leaven which a woman received and folded into three measures of wheat flour, until the whole lot was leavened. †

You see, my beloved friends, you are the leaven that is hidden in this place, for that is what it actually says in Greek:

Ὁμοία ἐστὶ ζύμη, ἣν λαβοῦσα γυνὴ ἔκρυσεν εἰς ἀλεύρου σάτα τρία, ἕως οὗ ἐζυμώθη ὅλον. ‡

We are the leaven of this world, and for any of you who have ever baked a loaf of bread, you know that without the yeast, the dough does not rise. And you must work the leaven into the dough – and when you have done it correctly, the leaven is hidden. Like salt dissolved in a glass of water, you cannot see it, but it is everywhere present. Like the air we breathe. Like the Holy Spirit in this world.

In society, that is what the Church is like. We are present, if not obvious, and we are working always to transform the world through love and compassion, mercy and forgiveness, understanding and reconciliation. The Church operates beneath the surface of the world's concerns, as the hymn says: “ἱεροκρυφίως” – “in a hidden sacred manner.”§

And so, I am so proud of this community for the transformation that has occurred over the last ten years. You have built so much that is the glory of our Byzantine tradition, and established so much ministry that is a testament to your faithfulness. The decades to come will surely reflect the glory that you have raised up here in Williamsburg, through the intercessions of your heavenly protector, Saint Demetrios the Great-Martyr. Amen!

* Luke 12:32.

† Luke 13:20-21

‡ Luke 13:21.

§ Οἱ Ἀναβαθμοὶ Ἦχος δ΄, Ἀντίφωνον Α΄.

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