

Homily By Archbishop Elpidophoros of America On the Sunday of the Last Judgment (Meatfare) Saint Sophia Greek Orthodox Cathedral



My dearest sisters and brothers in Christ,

Today, in this magnificent Cathedral, adorned with the glories of Byzantium and the beauty of our Orthodox Faith, we gather as a community, which, as all of you know, is a form of communion. The Holy Communion that we receive – the Body and Blood of the Lord – is what binds us together. It is the substance of God, the Divine DNA, that makes us a family in God. All of us are members of the Body of Christ, and our communion with each other is truly a sign of the sincerity of our communion with God.

That is why, on this Sunday of Meatfare, when we say farewell to many foods and flavors that we enjoy, we look to the Gospel for another kind of happiness. This famous Gospel reading, when the Lord returns in glory to judge the living and the dead, speaks of another form of bliss.

Then the king will say to those at his right hand, “Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a

stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me."*

You hear the Lord call those at His right Hand, the "blessed of my Father." What state of human existence could be higher than this? Than to be the "blessed of the Father?" This is true happiness and true reward, which no earthly pleasure could ever give. This is the fruit of communion with God, because it demonstrates that the attributes of God have become our own. And what are these?

To give food to the hungry.

To give drink to the thirsty.

To welcome the stranger.

To clothe the naked.

To visit the sick.

To go to those imprisoned.

My beloved friends,

These are not words. These are deeds.

These are not declarations of faith. These are the results of faith.

These are not expressions of hope. These the gifts of hope.

These are not affirmations of love. These are acts of love.

There are no restrictions about who may receive these deeds. Whether they are Orthodox or not. Christian or not. good or not. For as our Lord said:

Your heavenly Father allows His sun to rise upon the evil and the good, and He causes showers to rain down upon the just and the unjust. †

Beloved brothers and sisters,

On this Sunday, when we bid farewell to some of life's pleasures, the Lord points us to the way of true and lasting happiness. Our eternal happiness is to be found in our loving and compassionate service to others. Because it shows us how we take the effects of Holy Communion – the Body and Blood of Christ that we receive in the Divine Liturgy – and mirror this closeness and proximity to Christ in the world outside the Liturgy.

You hear how to expand Holy Communion into every corner of your life in the questions posed by those at the Right Hand, who asked:

"Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?" ‡

But you already know the answer to these questions; for the King replied:

"Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you did it unto Me." §

Therefore, let us joyfully embrace the first sign of the Holy Fast today, even as we prepare to feast one last time on our favorite meats.

Let us embrace a life of service to others – without regard to their persons, their privilege, or their poverty; for the sun shines on all, even as the rain falls on all without regard.

Let us extend our communion with God – the Holy Communion we experience in the Church – beyond the walls of the Church. To everyone.

By generously nourishing their hearts.

By lovingly soothing their parched souls.

By welcoming every stranger.

By covering the nakedness of another's sins.

By sharing our presence with those whose sickness is of the heart.

By going to those imprisoned by their own negativity, and declaring the liberation through love of God and love of neighbor.

Thus, we shall arrive at the Holy Pascha of the Lord, with hearts ablaze and minds

illumined. And we shall enter into the blessedness of the Holy Father, and know our place at His Divine Right Hand.

Amen.

* Matthew 25:34-36.

† Matthew 5:45.

‡ Matthew 25:37-39.

§ Matthew 25:40.

Photos: GANP/Bill Petros

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