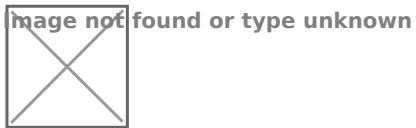


His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros Homily at the Third Salutations to the Theotokos



Beloved and Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

We chanted Third Stanza of the Salutations tonight in this wonderful Church of Saint Barbara, an historic community of the Greek Orthodox People of New York. And just as in this beautiful church we are surrounded by the icons, the Saints, the Angels and the Mother of God herself, I say to all of you: They are surrounded by you as well.

They are surrounded by your love.

They are surrounded by your faithfulness.

They are surrounded by your deep yearning to be with them at this holy time and in this holy place.

We come together to chant and proclaim the glories of the Theotokos, with such inspired verses as these:

Χαῖρε, ἡ τάναντία εἰς ταύτὸ ἀγαγοῦσα,
χαῖρε, ἡ παρθενίαν καὶ λοχείαν ζευγνῦσα.

Rejoice, You who make things that differ to agree,

rejoice You who yoke together motherhood and virginity. [*]

The Virgin-Mother of our Lord achieves a miracle of miracles by her assent to offer her very body to the salvific and divine Plan for our Salvation. She yokes together “motherhood and virginity” in a strange and deeply spiritual manner. And she offers to her Creator the love that only a mother can give, perhaps the greatest love a human can experience, because it is the mother’s love that brings us forth into this world, though she must endure much pain and labor to do so.

Our Savior knew of this pain and suffering. And so, the only description of the Passion and the terrible Sacrifice of the Cross that He ever gave to His Disciples is

of a woman giving birth. As He Himself says in the Gospel of John, on the night in which He gave Himself up for the life of the world:

When a woman is in labor, she has pain because her time has come. But when she has brought forth the child, she no longer remembers her distress because of her joy that a human being has been born into the world.[†]

The Lord gave birth to us miraculously upon the Cross, just as his Holy Mother gave birth to Him in the Cave of Bethlehem. Moreover, just as she nursed the Lord on her own breast to nourish and feed Him, our Lord Jesus Christ poured forth His own blood and water from the lance that pierced His side to nourish the Church, through Baptism and the Eucharist. [‡]

My friends, the Holy Theotokos was both Virgin and Mother, and by a strange miracle, our Lord Jesus Christ, who was a virgin in his humanity, is also a kind of Mother to us, inasmuch as the Church is His Body, and we call it, "Mother Church."

It should come as no surprise that the mystery of the Virgin Mary's maternity should be mirrored in our Lord's humanity, for He assumed our human nature entirely from her.

Indeed, we call the Holy Ecumenical Patriarchate our "Mother Church," because she nourishes and sustains us through her canonical Mantle, which is spread across our great land by the Sacred Archdiocese of America.

Truly, we see, in many layers of meaning, the truth of the Akathist that we sing tonight:

Χαῖρε, ἡ τάναντία εἰς ταύτο ἀγαγοῦσα,
χαῖρε, ἡ παρθενίαν καὶ λοχείαν ζευγνῦσα.

Rejoice, You who make things that differ to agree,
rejoice You who yoke together motherhood and virginity.

The Holy Virgin reconciles opposites in her own person, and thus we prepare to receive our reconciliation to God.

Through her holy prayers on our behalf, may we always find ourselves in her sacred embrace, which is the embrace of our Holy Mother Church, the Body of Christ, which feeds and nourishes us for eternity.

Amen.

[*] Third Stasis, Omicron.

[†] John 16:21.

[‡] John 19:34.

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