

Archbishop Elpidophoros Homily at the Divine Liturgy - Veneration of the Cross



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Your Grace, Bishop Timotheos and Reverend Clergy,

Dear Family of the ever-memorable Father Nicholas Nikokavouras,

Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

The confluence of commemorations today: the Veneration of the Holy Cross, the Greek Independence Parade, and the Forty Day Memorial for the late and beloved Father Nicholas, the servant of this Cathedral for decades, is truly inspiring.

Father Nicholas, whose memorial we observe today, was a perfect admixture of the best of the Orthodox Church, and the best of Hellenic heritage. His ministry – a long and fruitful one in this Cathedral and in our Sacred Archdiocese of America – combined the finest elements of both traditions, and gifted to all, who had the honor and pleasure to know him, a superb ministry. We remember him most worthily on this Sunday of the Veneration of the Holy Cross, because his entire priestly life was one of following the Lord, and willingly carrying the Cross of service to his parish and community, of support for the causes of the Faith and the Homeland, and of assistance to those in need.

How many times did Father Nicholas bow low before the Cross of the Lord here in this Church! And not only on this very special Third Sunday of Lent. His pious soul was always humble before the Lord of Glory.

How many times did Father Nicholas make the sign of the Cross upon his noble person here in this Church, as he entered and prayed with you and for you.

And how many times did Father Nicholas make the sign of the Cross over all of you, the faithful parishioners of this historic Cathedral. And not only here, but in your homes, in hospitals, in nursing homes, and wherever his ministry was needed.

He led you like Moses led the children of Israel in the wilderness for forty years. He taught you and organized you. He prayed with you, wept and laughed with you,

and was a shining example of God's love for you throughout his diakonia here at Annunciation.

Moreover, as we prepare to mark our Greek Independence Celebration by the Annual Parade, I know he will be with us in spirit as we march down Halstead Street. He marched so many times, and encouraged all of you to be proud of your heritage and not to be afraid to share it with others. He was the best of the best, and acknowledging him so on this, the Forty Day Memorial of his passing over from this life to eternal life in God, is a privilege for me as your Archbishop, and a moment for this Cathedral community to come together in respect and in deep appreciation for the decades of his continuous ministry of love.

Indeed, He bowed before the Cross of our Lord many times here in this glorious sanctuary, because he understood what the Cross truly means. What our Lord said on the night in which He gave Himself up for the life of the world:

Αὕτη ἐστὶν ἡ ἐντολὴ ἡ ἐμή, ἵνα ἀγαπᾶτε ἀλλήλους καθὼς ἠγάπησα ὑμᾶς. Μείζονα ταύτης ἀγάπην οὐδεὶς ἔχει, ἵνα τις τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ θῇ ὑπὲρ τῶν φίλων αὐτοῦ.

"This is my commandment: love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, to sacrifice your life for your friends." *

As Christians, as Orthodox Christians, we are bound to this commandment – an ἐντολή that rises above every canon, every dogma, every tradition that we hold so dear. For if we do not hold this commandment first and foremost, everything else in the Church is devoid of meaning.

Father Nicholas knew this in his very bones. And so, we honor his memory today, and take whatever goodness he imparted to us out into the Street today, to march with pride for our Faith and for our Γένος. Ὑπὲρ Πίστεως καὶ Πατρίδας.

May the servant and priest of God, Nicholas, abide forever in the mansions of the Saints, in the bosom of Abraham, and in the tabernacles of the Righteous. Γένοιτο. So be it. Amen.

* John 15:12-13.

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