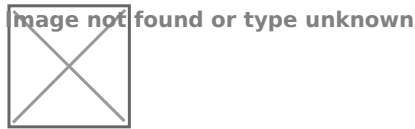


10/04/2024

Archbishop Elpidophoros Archpastoral Exhortation to the Metropolis of New Jersey Clergy Laity Assembly and Philoptochos Convention



His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros
Archpastoral Exhortation to the
Metropolis of New Jersey Clergy Laity Assembly and
Philoptochos Convention
April 9, 2024

“The Waterfall” – Claymont, Delaware

Your Eminence, Metropolitan Apostolos, Beloved Brother in Christ,
Very Reverend Nektarios Cottros, Chancellor of the Metropolis,
Protopresbyter Kosmas Karavellas, Vicar General of the Metropolis,
Protopresbyter George Chioros, President of Clergy Syndesmos,
Archon James Polos, Vice Chair of the Metropolitan Council,
Mrs. Eleni Constantinides, President of the Metropolis Philoptochos,
Reverend Fathers,
Esteemed Archons of the Ecumenical Patriarchate,
Supreme President of AHEPA,
Honored Members of Leadership 100,
Dear Sisters of the Metropolis Philoptochos,
Esteemed Delegates to the Clergy Laity Assembly,

Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Once again we are assembled for the Clergy Laity Assembly of the Holy Metropolis of New Jersey, and we convene with your new Metropolitan, His Eminence Apostolos. As you all know, his elevation to the Office of Metropolitan did not suddenly bring him into your lives. He served here with distinction and true pastoral ministry as an Auxiliary Bishop. Now, he assumes all the responsibilities for your spiritual welfare.

And it is very evident to me that my dear brother in the Holy Spirit has undertaken his Hierarchical duties with full force in this wonderful Metropolis. Your programs and parishes are thriving, and you are all deeply engaged with our communal journey of the Holy Lent, despite the events of last week.

The total solar eclipse and earthquake in this region caused alarm for many, and there are those who take these to be signs from God. Or perhaps, they are trying to manipulate others by claiming that these are signs from God. And yes, while the Scripture does speak of such things in both the Old and New Testaments, I feel that this Clergy Laity Assembly has found a better and more enduring inspiration for your spiritual labors. I am speaking, of course, about your theme, which informs not only your various ministries, but the manner in which you pursue them.

Νυνὶ δὲ μένει πίστις, ἐλπίς, ἀγάπη, τὰ τρία ταῦτα· μείζων δὲ τούτων ἡ ἀγάπη.

And now faith, hope and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.[1]

This is one of the most beloved and well known verses of the entire New Testament, and especially of the Letters of the Apostle Paul. It is the finishing verse of the famous Chapter Thirteen of his First Epistle to the Corinthians, and it provides the “bird’s eye” – or perhaps better – “God’s Eye” view of what the Church is really about.

While there will always be those who twist and turn the Scriptures, and even the traditions of the Church, for their own purposes, but the fundamental truth of these verses will withstand the test of time. For they are eternal. They abide forever. Μένουνε εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα.

Faith, hope, and love. What a wonderful trinity of virtues to reflect the glory of the Consubstantial and Undivided Holy Trinity.

Our Faith is the faith that was once delivered to the Saints — ἡ ἀπαξ παραδοθεῖσα

τοῖς ἁγίοις πίστει, as the Letter of the Apostle Jude states. [2] This is what defines our Orthodox Church, because, as we say in the Synodikon of Orthodoxy that we proclaim every First Sunday of Lent:

This is the Faith of the Apostles!

This is the Faith of the Fathers!

This is the Faith of the Orthodox!

This is the Faith that has established the Oikoumene!

Unchanged, unaltered, unalloyed – this is the truth of what we have been taught, and what we teach in all our churches, seminaries, and institutions. It is our proclamation of the “Everlasting Gospel.” [3]

This is our Faith. What then is our Hope? Nothing less than the Resurrection of the Flesh that we affirm in the Creed, the Symbol of our Faith. Hence we declare in every memorial for our dearly departed that they have fallen asleep ἐπ’ ἐλπίδι ἀναστάσεως – in the hope of the Resurrection.

This is our essential longing for eternal life, that is satisfied and made possible by God. If we are fortunate, we spend seven to nine decades on this earth – as the Psalmist says:

The days of our years in their span are seventy, and if we have the strength, perhaps eighty, and what is more than these is toil and travail. [4]

But our life is by definition limited, and we must all travel on. That is why the expectation of the Resurrection is the greatest hope of all.

But what makes our faith and our hope possible is nothing less than the love of God, which is surely the greatest of these three! For the love of God overcomes every obstacle, every sin, every shortcoming imaginable. And it is the one characteristic that reveals the true identity of the Church and of all Her members, as the Lord Himself said:

This is how all people shall know that you are My Disciples, if you love one another. [5]

Therefore, beloved Christians of this wonderful and Sacred Metropolis of New Jersey:

Let us commence the work of this Clergy Laity Assembly with fidelity to our Faith,
With ever-increasing hope in the power of the Resurrection for our lives,
And with love in our hearts for God and one another.

Thus, we shall be well-pleasing to the Lord and complete the Lenten Journey to behold, in due time, the Pascha of the Lord.

Amen.

[1] I Corinthians 13:13.

[2] Jude 1:3.

[3] Revelation 14:6.

[4] Psalm 89: 10-11 (LXX).

[5] John 13:35.

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