30/04/2024

Archbishop Elpidophoros Homily for the First Bridegroom Service Great and Holy Monday



Beloved brothers and sisters in Christ:

Now we have arrived at the somber services of Holy Week, so that may greet the Lord, as our Bridegroom, for He is Coming to His voluntary Passion for our sake and the sake of the whole world.

This morning was glorious! In every Church across our Archdiocese, His Entry into the Holy City was attended by adoring throngs, who cast their garments, and the palms and branches before Him. But tonight, the glory of Lord is hidden.

Instead of a crown of the sun, moon, and stars, He wears a crown of thorns.

Instead of the garments of light which adorn His Godhead,[*] there is the purple of mockery.

Instead of His precious hands being praised by their works that established the firmament,[†] they are bound as a common criminal.

And in place of the rod of iron with which He shall rule the Nations, to break in pieces the gates of death like a potter’s vessels, [‡] He holds a weak and worthless reed as a sign of humiliation.

We call the Lord the King of Glory, but tonight, we call Him the Bridegroom of the Church. And his wooing of us is not from any worldly reason that we should desire Him.

As the Prophet Isaiah says:

He has no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him. He is despised and rejected of men; a Man of Sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid our faces from Him; he was despised, and we esteemed Him not. [§]

This is the challenge of Holy Week – to recognize in this Bridegroom, the very God Who created us and loves us just as we are. It is hard for us to admit that His humiliation, His torture, and His death were accomplished for our sake.

Why do we need such a Bridegroom?

Why do we need such a Divine Lover?

Because through sin, through resentment, through envy, through pride, and through our lack of love and generosity toward others, we are dwelling in darkness.

That is why He comes to us in the middle of the night, ἐν τῷ μέσῳ τῆς νυκτός, in the middle of our dark night of the soul, to find us just as we are, that we may discover who we really are.

The garments that He wears are not showy, extravagant decorations meant to inspire awe and attraction. They are tokens of His love.

His Crown of Thorns brings forth His Divine Blood to nourish us.

His purple robe of ridicule covers our sins.

His hands are bound so that we might be set free.

And the reed that is meant to disgrace Him, is a reminder of His gentleness in judgment with the world. As the Prophet says:

A bruised reed He shall not break….[**]

The Lord knows that we are but reeds, blown by every wind and troubled. Every human being is, as someone once said, “only a reed, the most feeble in nature, but a thinking reed.” [††] We are fragile, and we bruise all too easily. But the Lord will never break us. His judgments are righteous and true; they are never harsh or cruel.

Therefore, my beloved Christians:

Let us welcome the Bridegroom Who comes to us tonight. He comes to remind us that He is ready to embrace us as His own. He comes to claim his Bride, which is the Church. And the dowry He will pay is greater than anyone has ever paid, because He paid it for everyone.

If we will receive Him, He will carry us all into the Heavenly Bridal Chamber, where we will live with Him in eternity in the resurrection and restoration of all things.

Through His grace and love for all humankind, together with His Father and All Holy Spirit, One God, praised and glorified forever. Amen.

[*] Cf. Psalm 18:1 (LXX).

[†] Cf. Psalm 103:2 (LXX).

[‡] Cf. Revelation 2:27.

[§] Isaiah 53:2-3.

[**] Isaiah 42:3.

[††] Blaise Pascal, Pensées.

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