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Archbishop Elpidophoros Homily for the Service of the Lamentations



His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros
Homily for the Service of the Lamentations at the Tomb
The Matins of Holy and Great Saturday
May 3, 2024
Saint Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church and National Shrine
New York, New York

My Beloved Christians,

Tonight I ask you to look within yourselves, to look around your life, to look around the world, and ask a single question:

“Can these bones live?” [*]

The Lord God challenged the holy Prophet Ezekiel with these very words, when He showed him the Valley of Dry Bones. And He challenges us as well.

In this, our holy Epitaphios Service, we read this prophecy and the vision of the Valley of the Dry Bones, after our chants of eager expectation in the resurrection of

the Life in the Tomb – Ἡ Ζωὴ ἐν τάφῳ.

We look around our world, and we see dry bones of hopelessness that fill valley after valley of human experience. Continuous wars in Ukraine and in Israel, the continuing suffering and division in our beloved Cyprus, and the poverty and disease that our fellow human beings endure every day.

And my dear brothers and sisters in Christ, we do not need to look across the oceans. We can look around our own neighborhoods, and see suffering and despair. Dry bones abound in our City, even in the shadow of the rebuilt World Trade Center. We can close our eyes and shut our ears to the pain of others, but their pain is no less real.

And finally, my beloved, we are called to look within ourselves. How dry and brittle are our bones? There are always moments in our lives, when we cry out, as did the Israelites in the prophesy:

Our bones are dried up, our hope is lost, and we are completely cut off! [†]

Tonight, dear Christians, as we gather around the Kouvouklion, let us remember that though He willed to die for our sake, the Lord was never νεκρός. Yes, His human soul did separate from His human body, but the Divine Person of the Son of God was never separated from any aspect of His Incarnation.

He remains lively and life-giving – even in the Tomb: Ἡ Ζωὴ ἐν τάφῳ. He is the One Who waters the parched landscape of our souls, our communities, and our world, with His Precious Blood. “He makes springs to break forth in the desert, and a thirsty land into streams of water.” [‡] He turns ‘the wilderness and the solitary place into gladness; and the desert into joy, blossoming as the rose.’ [§]

The dry bones of the Prophet Ezekiel’s Vision represent the loneliness, the hopelessness, the anguish, and the despondency of death. But the Lord of Hosts is the Conqueror of death. And tonight, in this Epitaphios Service, we proclaim His victory, as we enter the Sabbath of Sabbaths, in this Matins of Holy Saturday. Whatever is lacking in your life this evening. Whatever is dried up, withered and spent, like the fig tree that bore no fruit for our Lord when He was hungry.[**] Whatever gives us no joy or gladness. All of these dry bones that hold no hope and no χαρά for us – they can live again!

For the Lord God asks: “Can these bones live?” [††] And the answer is “Yes!” If we will but speak the word of the Lord in our lives, in our communities, in our world. We can speak the word of love, of mercy, of forgiveness. We can speak the words

of Λόγος of God, Who became human for our sake, to teach, redeem, and to heal us. This is why we stand before the Life in the Tomb, and though His voice is temporarily silenced, we sing His praises with all our hearts. We lift our voices in prophesy, in hymns, in readings, and in our petitions.

My beloved People of God: Hear the word of the Lord:

“Behold, I will open your graves, and raise you from your graves, O my people. And I will bring you home … And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves, and raise you from the tomb.”[‡‡] Καλή Ἀνάσταση!

Photos: GOARCH/Dimitrios Panagos

[*] Ezekiel 37:3.

[†] Ezekiel 37:11.

[‡] Psalm 106:35 (LXX).

[§] Cf. Isaiah 35:1.

[**] Cf. Matthew 21:19.

[††] Ezekiel 37:3.

[‡‡] Ezekiel 37:12-13.

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