03/06/2024

Archbishop Elpidophoros Greeting at the 86th Archdiocesan Cathedral Gala



Your Graces, Bishop Athenagoras and Bishop Nektarios,

Very Reverend Archimandrite Chrysostom and Reverend Fathers,

Archdiocese Cathedral Board of Trustees President Elias Lambiris,

Members of the Cathedral Board and Philoptochos Sisterhood,

Cathedral Gala Co-Chairs,

Beloved Members of the Stephanopoulos Family,

Dear Friends,

Χριστὸς Ἀνέστη!

I am delighted to have returned in time from Greece, where I represented His All Holiness at the Fourth International Archon Conference on Religious Freedom, in order be with you for this 86th Cathedral Gala.

In a worthy tribute for this special occasion, we are honoring one of the longest serving Deans of this Cathedral, and one of the most respected clergymen of our Sacred Archdiocese, the learned Protopresbyter Robert (Haralambos) Stephanopoulos. And we are honoring as well the memory of his incomparable Presvytera, Nikki Stephanopoulos, whose falling asleep in the Lord last year marked an era in the life of our Church. Presvytera's communications skills and contacts were legendary, and her contributions to the Archdiocese and our Patriarchate were inestimable.

Together with Father Robert, they formed a remarkable partnership of prayer, piety, and purpose for Orthodox Christianity on these shores. The presence of their children, George, Mother Agapia, and Marguerite, with their extended families, is a reminder of the power and prestige of this extraordinary household. In the persons of their children, we express our deepest gratitude for the many, many gifts that Father Robert and Presvytera Nikki gave to the Church of America. Their contributions – particularly to this Cathedral they shepherded for so many years – will never be forgotten.

I note with great satisfaction that the new icon of the Holy Trinity on the iconostasion, which was installed just a few days before last Christmas, was donated in honor of both Father Robert and Presvytera Nikki. The new icon, which is based on the Biblical narrative of the Visitation of the Three Angels to Abraham and Sarah at the Oak of Mamre, is an image of the communion of the Three Divine Persons of the Godhead. It is a Trinitarian image par excellence, and perhaps no more famously rendered than in the icon known as the "Rublev Trinity." Yet, it is also an image of community for all of us.

The life of the Holy Trinity – the inter-dwelling, or περιχώρησις in Greek, of the Divine Persons within One Another is an example for all of us. We find our greatest purpose and meaning in life as we live in service to others through love. For, as the Scripture says, “God is love.” Ὁ Θεὸς ἀγάπη ἐστίν.[*]

This kind of pure and unselfish love is something that was exemplified by the ministry of Father Robert and Presvytera Nikki, especially during their years leading this Cathedral Community.

Therefore, as we celebrate their ministry this evening, let us honor them by committing – each and every one of us – to cultivating a spirit of loving service to one another.

Let us bring forth in our lives the essence of the Sacred Icon of the Holy Trinity.

Let us find the deepest and most profound meaning of our lives in to giving of ourselves for the sake of love to one another.

This is the foundation that can never be moved, never be troubled, never be shaken; for it rests upon the Chief Cornerstone Himself, our Lord Jesus Christ.

From His perfect love for humanity, He sacrificed His life for the life of the world, and we renew that love every time we gather as community within the walls of our Cathedral for the sake of Holy Communion.

Father Robert led you in these prayers and praise for many years, and we give thanks to his family for his ministry tonight, at this wonderful 86th Gala of our magnificent Holy Trinity Archdiocesan Cathedral. Let us always hold Father Robert and Presvytera Nikki in our hearts, and work for the good of this marvelous community they served so well and so long.

May the Lord’s blessing always be upon us!

Χριστὸς Ἀνέστη!

[*] I John 4:8.

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