13/06/2024

Archbishop Elpidophoros of America Homily at the Divine Liturgy for the Feast of the Apostle Bartholomew Saint Bartholomew's Church New York City



Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Christ is Risen! Χριστὸς Ἀνέστη!

This is the third occasion that we have been so graciously welcomed here at Saint Bartholomew's Church – a true landmark of the City of New York. Once again, we offer the Divine Liturgy in thankfulness to God for the sacred person of the Spiritual Father of Orthodox Christianity – His All Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, Archbishop of Constantinople, the New Rome.

I wish to express my gratitude to Bishop Matthew Foster Heyd of the Episcopal Diocese of New York, to our esteemed host, the Right Reverend Dean Wolfe, Rector of Saint Bartholomew's, and to the Reverend Peter Thompson, Vicar of the Parish for his invaluable assistance in preparation for today's Divine Service.

We are joined today by Hierarchs of our Archdiocese, and in celebrating through the liturgical practice known as "Chorostasia," we participate in the Χορός of the Angels and the Στάσις of Divine Presence, so magnificently manifested in this

aesthetic treasure-house of worship.

There is a reason that we come to Saint Bartholomew's on this day, June 11th, the Feastday of the Ecumenical Patriarch. Yes, it is clearly linked to his Celestial Patron and the dedicatory Saint of this church, but there is much more.

As I have said many times, His All Holiness is the very definition of ecumenical outreach, and even interfaith outreach, as I witnessed last evening at the Interfaith Center of New York, founded by another great personage of the Episcopal Church in New York, the late Dean James Parks Morton.

Such connectedness with others is often feared in many Christian communities today, as if contact with those of differing perspectives might somehow pollute one's faith. The political echo-chambers that afflict our Nation are being mirrored – and sometimes even inspired by – the ecclesiastical echo-chambers that pretend to be deaf to the voices songs that surround us.

But we are here today – in this glorious and famous church – to demonstrate that the courage to listen is more pleasing to God than a sham pretense to faithfulness, that cuts off communication with one's neighbors. And we are neighbors – of the same city and region, and, to an extent, the same history. This courage is precisely what His All Holiness Bartholomew has practiced for the duration of his Patriarchy – the longest in the annals of the Great Church of Christ. He has manifested integrity with love, steadfastness with mercy, and fidelity with candor.

Thus, the Ecumenical Patriarch models for the Orthodox Christian Church, and for all people of good will, what it means to love your neighbor, even as you claim to love God. For as the Lord Jesus Christ taught us, it is impossible to love God unless you love your neighbor. I am mindful of what the word neighbor – πλησίον – means in the original language of the New Testament: literally, anyone with whom you come in contact. There is no sense in the word of choice, or personal inclination; merely the happenstance of place, for the word comes from the adverb, πέλας, that simply signifies "nearby."

The Patriarch welcomes all at the Phanar, the Sacred Center of worldwide Orthodoxy. Every human being is his potential neighbor, no matter their origin or experience. He embraces everyone as being homoousios to himself – of the same essential nature. Thus he prepares the Christian world to celebrate the anniversary of one thousand and seven hundred years of the First Ecumenical Council in Nicaea that bequeathed this amazing theological definition to the Church and to the world. This homoousion is why we acknowledge every human being as our neighbor.

We all know how the Lord Jesus answered the legalist who asked Him, “And who is my neighbor.” The “Good” Samaritan is a parable known across all Christian communities, and yet, it’s principle message seems to be slipping away from those who bear His Holy Name. While we are called to see no stranger, more and more Christians are objectifying others without love, out of fear and insecurity, and magnifying hatred.

Thus, we have come to our neighbor’s church today. In honor of our Ecumenical Patriarch on the Feastday of his Heavenly Patron. To remind the world that the courage to stop on the path, and to reach out to those whom God places in your presence, is an act of love. Love of God, and love of neighbor. They cannot be separated.

Saint Paul reminds us of our own distance from God, and how we are came to be close to Him again:

But now, through Christ Jesus, you who were once far away have become close by the Blood of Christ.*

Therefore, Brothers and Sisters:

Let us give thanks to God for this glorious occasion today; for the privilege to remember our Great Ecumenical Patriarch, His All Holiness, Bartholomew – Archbishop of Constantinople, New Rome, and to follow his example of love, of courage, and of presence.

Let us cry aloud: Many Years, Most Holy Despota!

Εἰς Πολλά Ἔτη, Παναγιώτατε Δέσποτα!

Christ is Risen! Truly, He is Risen!

* Ephesians 2:13.

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