04/07/2024

His Grace Bishop Nektarios of Diokleia Sermon at Divine Liturgy Clergy Laity Congress 2024 Wednesday, July 3, 2024



Most Honorable representatives of the Ecumenical Patriarchate,

Your Eminence Archbishop Nikitas of Thyateira and

Your Eminence Metropolitan Cleopas of Sweden,

Your Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros of America,

Your Eminences and Graces,

Dear Ecumenical Guests,

Reverend Clergy and Presbyteres of our Holy Archdiocese,

Delegates of the 47th Biennial Clergy-Laity Congress, I greet you with a salutation of profound love in our Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ.

As we are all gathered here today for our biennial Clergy-Laity Congress to exemplify the work and mission of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, we are also gathered in this Divine Liturgy, as the Church, manifesting that our faith in

Christ should always be at the center of our lives. As Saint Paul wrote to the Galatians: “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness.” (Galatians 5:22) Prayer is one of the most basic expressions of our devotion, love, and faith in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. It is out of worship, through our common participation in the Divine Economy of God, that all of us become Christians and have received the gifts of the Holy Spirit, in the Church, even as we serve from the charisms granted through the Royal Priesthood to the people of God, Deacon, Presbyter, or Bishop.

Therefore, when we gather as the Church (Ecclesia) our true purpose is realized. Whenever we are called to gather, it is imperative to start with prayer, because we recognize that Christ is in our midst. In gathering for this Clergy-Laity Congress to discuss administrative matters that concern the whole Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, let us keep in mind that we have to approach our responsibilities in humility to make sure we are growing the body of the Church and not becoming an obstacle to the Lord’s teaching.

Prayer brings our life closer to the mystery of communion with God by asking for His guidance and Divine wisdom to empower us in the life of the Church. Last Sunday, as we celebrated the Synaxis of the twelve Apostles, what came to mind is that the Apostles met to make decisions all together. The paradigm of the first council of Jerusalem continues to fashion the synodal organization of the Orthodox Church. The first fruit of this coming together as Christ’s body is listening so that with the holy Apostles we can also say: “It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us.” (Acts 15:28) For us here today, we need to re-emphasize that the Church is not a human organization that was simply created. She is the continuation of Christ’s mission in the world, which started on the day of Pentecost and continues today through the power of the Holy Spirit. As Christ is the head of the Church which continues to be guided by the Holy Spirit, it is through the Apostles and as an extension by the teaching of the Church Fathers throughout the ages that we continue to be bearers of truth and to preach the Holy Gospel, the Good News of Christ’s resurrection from the dead, in the contemporary world.

Every period in history has its own challenges and tribulations which need to be addressed according to our Christian ethos. Those challenges in the Church locally are addressed by the Synod of the local Hierarchs, which is called in our American reality the Holy and Eparchial Synod that answers to the Holy and Sacred Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate presided over by His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew.

Secondly, in the context of the United States of America we are fortunate enough

to have another governing body through the Clergy-Laity Congress with the participation of everyone Clergy, Laity, men and women. Therefore, we have seen great successes in the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America. Now we are called to come together and through prayer to discern the needs of the next generation, while welcoming and embracing our fellow brothers and sisters who may have different talents to offer to the life of the Church. We must encourage our Clergy and our Parishioners to become more missionary minded and to be mindful of Christ's universal call for conversion and salvation for the entire world.

For us, to make a difference in our age, we have to dive into the rich past of the treasure passed onto us by our Orthodox faith and emphasize the important role of worship in our communities. Unless we instill these values in our children, we will have failed them and our vocation. If we are looking to pass on to our Children a healthy experience of the Church as life, we need to offer them a vision they will be willing to embrace. We all need to be more sincere and honest about our weaknesses and allow the youth to witness the life of the Church in all its glory, by being an example that embodies Christ's teaching and sacrifice. Once we show them the way, we then need to get out of the way and give them more responsibility for taking on leadership roles. If we don't start now, we will lose our children and the blame would be ours.

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