12/09/2024

Memorial Service held at St. Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church and National Shrine



September 11, 2024, St. Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church and National Shrine hosted a Memorial Service commemorating the victims of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros of America offered the service alongside St. Nicholas Archiepiscopal Vicar, Rev. Protopresbyter of the Ecumenical Throne Andreas Vithoulkas as well as New York Police Department, Fire Department of the City of New York, and Port Authority Chaplains who represented other faith traditions among the first responders.

After the presentation of the U.S. flag by the Port Authority Police Department Color Guards, the service began with Fr. Andreas's welcoming remarks, followed by the singing of the U.S. National Anthem, interpreted by Alyson Spina-Tsourakis. His Eminence then presided over the Orthodox Memorial Service, which Fr. Andreas introduced and explained to non-Orthodox Christian guests.

The interfaith portion of the event followed the Memorial Service, with the participation of Rabbi Noam Marans, American Jewish Committee, Msgr. Jamie Gigantiello, FDNY Chaplain as well as Imam Tahir Kukiqi and Rev. George Anastasiou, NYPD Chaplains by sharing a reading of Psalm 34. After a moment of silence, His Eminence Cardinal Timothy Dolan, Roman Catholic Archbishop of New York read Psalm 23, and Saint Nicholas Master Chanter, Dimitrios Katsiklis chanted the psalm in Greek.

Following the singing of the funeral hymn, Fr. Andreas then introduced the next section: testimony on the theme "rebuilding and resilience." Anthoula Katsimatides, whose brother John was killed during 9/11, offered reflections on her brother's life and the importance of the Shrine to families, New York City, and the world; Michael Arad, the designer of the National September 11 Memorial & Museum also offered a reflection on memory and resilience.

The event concluded with His Eminence's closing remarks, offered after NYPD Chaplain Rev. George Anastasiou and FDNY Chaplain Msgr. Jamie Gigantiello presented him with the 9/11 commemorative helmets. In his remarks, His

Eminence highlighted the significance of holding this memorial service in St. Nicholas at Ground Zero, emphasizing that this “resurrected and rebuilt House of God that…was destroyed on 9/11 is a place and indeed, a palace, of memory for all,” having been built as much “to honor those who gave their lives that day trying to save others, as to summon into our minds and hearts the lives that were lost.”

His Eminence stressed that even across “different traditions and different life experiences…we all share a common love and respect for the sanctity of human life,” encouraging attendees to “re-connect in love to those we lost – through prayer, through memory, through sharing stories and filling those blank pages on family albums with reminders of what was best in them,” for “what was best in them will always remain part of the best of us.”

Embodying these words, following the service Orthodox clergy, interfaith religious leaders, and lay attendees gathered in love and common humanity, grieving those lost while rejoicing at the beauty of today’s memorial and the hope St. Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church and National Shrine represents.

Photo: GOARCH/Dimitrios Panagos

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