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Archbishop Elpidophoros of America Closing Remarks for the September Eleventh Memorial Service

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His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros of America
Closing Remarks for the September Eleventh Memorial Service
September 11, 2024
Saint Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church and National Shrine
New York, New York

Dear Friends,

We have gathered today to remember – to re-connect to those we loved and lost on September Eleventh. The Saint Nicholas National Shrine is grateful to welcome and embrace all of you, and the roles and traditions that you proudly display and observe. For this Shrine, the resurrected and rebuilt House of God that once humbly graced Cedar Street and was destroyed on 9/11, is a place and indeed, a palace, of memory for all.

Here in New York City, we also join with those praying and calling into their hearts those who perished at the Pentagon and in Shanksville, Pennsylvania, for their hurt and grief is also our own. But as we all know so well, the World Trade Center is Ground Zero, the epicenter of the lifechanging tragedy that inaugurated – in the most painful and horrific way – the Twenty-First Century. That is why we rebuilt Saint Nicholas in the way that we did – 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, as a result of that most cruel and inhuman attack.

We may come from different traditions and different life experiences, but we all share a common love and respect for the sanctity of human life. And what was taken from families, friends, and truly – from the soul of our Nation on 9/11 – can never be replaced or superseded.

But we can remember. We can renew our spiritual ties with those whose loss still creates a deep void in our hearts. We can 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.

As the only religious site in the new World Trade Center, overlooking the Memorial Pools and the Museum, we feel a special responsibility to welcome everyone, and to invoke both within and without these walls all those whose lives were lost – either on that fateful Day, or in the subsequent years when their sacrifice of service to this place cost many their health, and even their lives.

It is the reason that we have included in the iconography of the Shrine depictions of the history of that day. It is the reason why the words of Pericles of Athens – the man responsible for the rebuilding of the Parthenon, one of the most recognized shrines in the world – are incised into the stone on the front of this Church. There is a reason that all the marble of this Shrine is from the same vein of stone that built the Parthenon twenty five hundred years ago. We repeat his words for our own heroes:

“For they gave their lives for the common weal, and in so doing won for themselves the praise which grows not old and

the most distinguished of all sepulchers — not that in which they lie buried, but that in which their glory survives in everlasting remembrance.”

My Friends, that is why we come here every year on 9/11; and why we shall continue to do so. For Everlasting Memory. For Eternal Memory. So that the world might never forget what happens when the most evil and hatred-filled act is faced with courage, with duty, with dignity, and above all, with love.

I thank you for your presence and your witness here today. I express to you my own, and the everlasting condolences of the Greek Orthodox People of America. And I commend each and every one of us to God’s mercy and love, so that we may always be worthy to remember every precious human life that was lost, so that they might be found in God, Who will wipe away every tear from their eyes.[*]

May God grant us all comfort and healing through the pain, and the grace to hold our dear ones in mind and heart, so that we may remember them as they most justly deserve – in honor and in gratitude for the lives they lived. Amen.

May their memory be eternal!

Photo: GOARCH/Brittainy Newman

[*] Cf. Revelation 7:17.

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