16/09/2024

Address for Hellenic College Holy Cross Convocation



His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros
Address for Hellenic College – Holy Cross Convocation
September 14, 2023
Maliotis Cultural Center
Brookline, Massachusetts
President Katos,

Your Eminences and Graces,

Honorable Symeon Tegos, Consul General of Greece in Boston,

Reverend Clergy,

Dear Students, Faculty, and Administration,

Our convocation today is an opportunity for me to invite all of you into hearing our call together. It is not merely an opportunity for an address, because the very word, "convocation," implies that we – all of us – are responding to a call. In our case, the call is from the Lord Himself, to follow Him. And that is what this institution is really about – teaching and manifesting the Way – the Ὁδός – that our Lord trod before us.

The Way of Faith. The Way of Hope. The Way of Love.

You are all here to learn how to walk in that Ὁδός – that Way that He trod, all the way to the Cross. Saint Isaac the Syrian, speaking of the Lord and of all who would follow Him, says:

His path has been trodden from the ages and from all generations by the cross and by death. … The path of God is a daily cross.1

And in another place the Saint challenges us:

No one has ascended into Heaven by means of ease, for we know where the way of ease leads and how it ends. … How is it with you, that the afflictions on the path

seem to you to be off the path? Do you not wish to follow the steps of the saints?2

On this day, when we fall down in worship before the Holy Cross, we are also called to embrace the Way of the Cross – the Via Crucis. It is a path that is not defined by our status, our position, our education, or whatever other category we may consider; for all of these things reflect our individual sense of self. They are all mirrors in which we see ourselves as Orthodox Christians, but as Saint Paul reminds us:

Βλέπομεν γὰρ ἄρτι δι᾽ ἐσόπτρου ἐν αἰνίγματι ….

For even now, we see through a looking-glass in obscurity ….3

Our own sense of ourselves is complicated, and even when we believe that we have fulfilled every aspect of the Faith – made every "jot and tittle" (ἰῶτα ἓν ἢ μία κεραία) as said in the Sermon on the Mount4 – the Lord challenges us to come to an even broader and expansive view of what it means to follow Him:

So also with you: when you have done everything that is commanded to you, you must say, 'We are useless servants, for we only did those things which we ought to have done'."5

I selected a very literal translation of the word, ἀχρεῖος, which is usually translated "unworthy" or "unprofitable." But its real meaning as an adjective is that whatever it is describing, is without any usefulness. I know that "useless" sounds a little harsh in English, perhaps even insulting. But however you choose to translate it, it is an unmistakable message that is important for all of us to hear.

And the message is this: Whatever we bring to the service of the Lord Christ and His Church – be it small or great – we are still called to go beyond every definition and category of what we think is the standard for our journey in His "Way." Because if we take credit for any offering of our time, talents, or treasure, then we have already defeated ourselves spiritually.

Why so? Because the Lord's greatest commandment to us is to 'love one another, as He loved us … that we should also love one another':

Ἀγαπᾶτε ἀλλήλους, καθὼς ἠγάπησα ὑμᾶς ἵνα καὶ ὑμεῖς ἀγαπᾶτε ἀλλήλους.6

My beloved community of the Holy Cross: Everything that is taught and learned in this sacred place turns on this commandment. For if it does not, if love is not the very heart-center of our Orthopraxy, then our Orthodoxy might not be as pure as we think, and not as useful – ἀχρεῖον.

And this commandment is the one that makes the fulfillment of all the rest not only profitable to ourselves, but to the world around us. We become the 'good and faithful servants' commended in the parable.7

And now, as I close my remarks for this Convocation, I commend all of you to the love of God, so that we may share that love with every sister and brother we encounter – whether they are of the Faith or not.

Let this be our unified response to the call of the Lord Who enjoins us to follow Him. To follow Him on the way to the Cross, where we learn to die to self and live to God and for others.

The Cross is our truest signpost for how to live our lives, by its divine power, may you all be blessed with successful and prosperous Academic Year.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father and the fellowship of the All-Holy Spirit will be with you, now and forever, and unto the ages of ages. Amen.

1 Homily 59.

2 Ibid.

3 I Corinthians 13:12.

4 Matthew 5:18.

5 Luke 17:10.

6 Luke 17:10.

7 Matthew 25:14-30.

Photo: GOARCH/Dimitrios Panagos.

goarch.org