23/09/2024

Archbishop Elpidophoros of America Homily at the Outreach Adult Baptism of the African-American Mission



His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros of America
Homily at the Outreach Adult Baptism of the
African-American Mission
September 21, 2024
Saint Catherine – Saint George Greek Orthodox Church
Astoria, New York

Reverend Fathers,

Beloved and Newly-Illuminated Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Εὐφραινέσθω τὰ οὐράνια, ἀγαλλιάσθω τὰ ἐπίγεια!

Let the Heavens rejoice, let things on earth make glad![1]

Today, my friends, is truly day of such joy and gladness, because Angels on high celebrate the re-birth of spirit and heart in these newly-enlightened souls.

Here, in the Church dedicated to the Great-Martyrs Catherine the All-Wise and George the Trophy-Bearer, you have made the open witness and confession that leads to life everlasting. You have uttered for yourselves the words of Faith that we call the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, and fulfilled in these Twelve Articles of the Symbol of our Faith, that which encapsulates the True Faith of the Twelve Apostles. In the presence of these Martyrs, you have given your own testimony to faith in Jesus Christ, the Only-Begotten Son of God.

As your Archbishop and spiritual Shepherd, I extend to you, and your families and friends who have joined with us today, my most sincere blessing and congratulations. You have made a great step in your ascent of the Ladder to Heaven, and you are helped along the way by the Virgin Mother of God, who became the Ladder of Lord's Descent into world of the human family.

I also congratulate Archimandrite Chrysostom Onyekakeyah, Project Coordinator for our Archdiocesan Mission and Outreach Development, whose ministry to the African-American community and People of Color has had such an auspicious beginning.

For here in the United States of America, where Orthodox Christianity is a minority representation of Christianity, we are determined to manifest as broad and inclusive diakonia as is possible. Our Lord Jesus Christ and His Holy Church welcome all, according to His divine saying:

All that My Father has bestowed upon Me will come to Me, and I will never cast out the one who comes to Me. [2]

So to be sure, my beloved newly-Baptized brothers and sisters, know that you have been given to the Lord Jesus by His Father, and that the Lord will never reject you, even when the inevitable stumbling-blocks and downfalls occur in your loves. That is why we value Confession so much, for as the Fathers teach, the tears of repentance are the renewal of the waters of the Baptismal Font.

Therefore, rest assured in God's love for you in this moment of His amazing grace. For by grace are we saved through faith, as the Apostle Paul has taught us.[3] The confession of the Faith that you made today is renewed in every Divine Liturgy, and

is essential to our ongoing witness to the love of God for each and every human being and the totality of His creation.

Each experience of the Eucharistic Worship of the Church is a “Kairos” – a moment when “again and again” – as intoned in the Divine Service – we re-member ourselves to God. That is the reason for the repetition. Our persistent prayers and declarations of faith are not those described by the Lord in the Sermon on the Mount – when He exhorted His Disciples:

And when you pray, do not babble on, prattling like the Gentiles, for they think that they will be heard because of their long spate of words. [4]

What we repeat in the Divine Service are not vanities. Each utterance is like a window into Heaven, much like the icons. We connect through these reminders, so that we may re-member ourselves to the God Who created us.

Your Baptism today – is your emergence from the Sacred Womb of the Church. It is the fulfillment of your catechesis, the period of time when you studied and were instructed in the Faith. But I urge you, do not cease from engaging with the truth of our Faith.

Being a Disciple of the Lord is a lifelong pursuit. We do not follow Him for a day, a week, or a year. We follow Him for life. We spend our lives learning from our Ultimate Teacher, and in return He grants us Eternal Life.

I pray that your spiritual path from here on, will be one that is perfect for you and the life you intend to lead. But you are also part of a much larger family now, for many brothers and sisters have been born from the Baptismal Womb that gave birth to you today.

I encourage you to be part of the family. To rely on the family. And to lean on the family when there is a need.

Through the prayers of Saints Catherine the All-Wise and Saint George the Trophy-bearer, may you be blessed in every aspect of your lives, and may you always live in such a way, that you glorify the God Whom you confessed today – the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, Who is glorified and lauded unto the ages of ages.

Amen!

Photo: GOARCH/Brittainy Newman

[1] Dismissal Hymn, Tone Three.

[2] John 6:37.

[3] Ephesians 2:8a.

[4] Matthew 6:7.

goarch.org