

12/12/2024

Archbishop Elpidophoros Homily for the Great Vespers of Saint Spyridon the Wonderworker



Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I am so very pleased to return to this magnificent Church in Washington Heights – dedicated to the Holy Father Spyridon, Bishop of Trimythous, to celebrate the Feastday Great Vespers with you.

All around the world, faithful Orthodox Christians are honoring this Wonderworker of God. And especially in Kerkyra, where his incorrupt relics are preserved; and his sacred name, his wondrous deeds, and those relics that bear witness to the power of the Resurrection are revered with great piety.

For me, the Feast of saint Spyridon always brings me back to a very special place off the shores of Constantinople. On the Island of Halki, where, as Metropolitan of Bursa, our Spiritual Father, His All Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, entrusted me to be the Abbot of the Holy Patriarchal and Stavropegial Monastery of the Holy Trinity. Even as we yet work and hope for the reopening of the Theological School after more than half a century since its closure, there is tremendous activity at the School, which I embraced with gusto upon my appointment by His All Holiness.

But on Halki Island, among all the issues we face there, is an extraordinary place that reminds us of how universal Saint Spyridon is for all the world. In the southeastern portion of the Island, in a location near the "Tsamlimani," the "Pine Shore," is the Holy and Patriarchal Skete of Saint Spyridon, a place of holiness and true miracles.

The history of the Skete is filled with wonders on its own. Originally founded by the Saintly Monk Arsenios Ganochorites in the Nineteenth Century, it is a holy remnant and a reminder of the many ascetics who dwelt on the Island of Halki throughout the ages, among its natural splendors.

And every year in July, the miraculous healing by Saint Spyridon of a man born blind named Theodore, is celebrated at the Skete. Like the Blind Man healed by our Lord Jesus Christ that we celebrate on the Sixth Sunday of Pascha, this Theodore was born without eyes. And through the miraculous power of the Saint, his body and his sight were restored.

Because of my own connection to Halki, both as a son of the Ecumenical Patriarchate and - until I was elected to the Archiepiscopal Throne of America - as Abbot of Halki, my own devotion to Saint Spyridon is very strong and lifelong.

Therefore, coming here to this grand and truly splendid Church built in his honor, holds special meaning for me. But I have to tell you, that the humble Skete of Saint Spyridon is filled with the same resplendent glory that its sister, here in Washington Heights, has. And even local Muslims come to the Shrine in order to pray and receive the blessing of the Saint.

My beloved Christians: Do you see how God unites us through the presence of His Saints? Like the Man Born Blind - whether he of the Gospel, or Theodore of Halki - we often go through life oblivious to the lights that rule the day; the constellations of the Saints who surround us and bind us together in the love of God Who moves the sun and other stars.¹

But when our eyes are opened through Divine Power, flowing through His Saints like our Wonderworker Spyridon, we become open to the universe of God's presence. We begin to see His Divine Workings in our lives. Like the light of the sun and moon and stars seen for the very first time, the appearance of God is overwhelming, as well as reassuring. We begin to see our way in the world, and we can move through life with greater ease and less painful stumbling.

In celebrating your precious Saint this evening, we are united to every other pious

soul whose eyes have been opened to the love of God – whether on the Island of Halki, or Kerkyra, or anywhere else on this wondrous planet earth. Θαυμαστός ὁ Θεὸς ἐν τοῖς ἁγίοις αὐτοῦ!

God is truly wondrous – is miraculous – in His Saints!2

May we never be willfully blind to His wonders, but through the intercessions of our Father and Wonderworker Saint Spyridon, Bishop of Trimythous, be always open to the marvelous workings of God in the world.

Amen.

1 Paradiso, Canto XXXIII, 145.

2 Psalm 67:36 (LXX).

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