

Diocesan Days - Day Three at the St. Sava Church in San Gabriel, California



The Holy Hierarchical Divine Liturgy on the final day of the three-day Diocesan Days and celebration of the 800th Anniversary of the Autocephaly of the Serbian Orthodox Church was officiated by His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros, Archbishop of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese with the concelebration of His Eminence Metropolitan Savas, (Greek Orthodox Archdiocese), Their Graces Bishop Longin of New Gracanica-Midwestern America, Bishop Mitrophan of Canada, Bishop Grigorije of Dusseldorf and Germany, Bishop Teodisije of Kosovo and Metohija, Bishop Irinej of Eastern America, Bishop David of Stobi (Archdiocese of Ohrid), Bishop Sergije of Bihac and Petrovac, Bishop Kirilo of Buenos Aires, Bishop Dimitrije of Herzegovina and host hierarch Bishop Maxim of Western America.

“This Divine Liturgy,” Bishop Maxim noted at the end of the service, “presided over by the Archbishop who was surrounded by many bishops, the reverend clergy, monastics, deacons, the beautiful chanting of our choir from Fresno and also seminarians from Kosovo and Metohija and all the faithful here today, summarizes

the celebration of our Serbian autocephaly received by St. Sava in the 13th century.”

Bishop Teodosije of Kosovo and Metohije, on behalf of His Holiness Serbian Patriarch Irinej, greeted the faithful and conveyed the blessings of the Serbian Patriarch to Bishop Maxim, the clergy, monastics and all the faithful in the Diocese of Western America that, just as they had until now, they remain on the path of St. Sava which is the path of Christ which leads to life everlasting.

In appreciation for the great work and sacrifice that went into the organization of this great celebration, Archbishop Elpidophoros conveyed the message of the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew that not only the bishops receive praise but also the priests who dedicate so much time to the welfare of the flock entrusted them. Therefore, he granted to the host priest the V. Rev. Protopresbyter Predrag Bojovic the right to wear a pectoral cross. This was met with much acclamation to the chanting of Axios by the choir, clergy, and people in unison.

A formal banquet and rich program followed in the main church hall. During the program, the seminarians from Prizren Seminary performed songs from their new CD, *Pesme iz Stare Srbije* (Songs from Old Serbia), folklore and etno group performances.

In his address during the banquet Archbishop Elpidophoros spoke of the special bond of brotherhood between the Serbian Orthodox and the Greek Orthodox communities throughout these many years and the joy felt at this long and close relationship between the Church of Constantinople and the Patriarchate of Serbia. “Over the past 800 years,” he continued, “the Serbian people have served the Lord Jesus Christ bravely. Through many challenges and difficulties, the Church of Serbia and her Patriarchs have fought the good faith, run the race, and kept the faith pure and undefiled (cf. 2 Timothy 4:7). In this world, better brothers and sisters can hardly be found than we have in the Serbian people. We pray that our good God would be pleased to grant us to “dwell together in unity” for many years to come until the Lord Himself returns.

At the conclusion of the banquet, the Archbishop presented a gift to Bishop Maxim of a silver icon, a copy of an icon from the archbishop’s previous monastery. “What is original about this icon of the Holy Trinity,” His Eminence said, “is that we don’t have the persons of the Holy Trinity depicted because they never appear together. It is only in the Old Testament with Abraham and his wife Sarah when they welcomed the three angels. This is the only way we can depict the Holy Trinity. This is called the hospitality of Abraham. And whenever we want to say a hospitality

was great we say this hospitality was Abrahamic. Which is the case today. Thank you, my Serbian brothers and sisters, for this Abrahamic hospitality.”

In return, Bishop Maxim presented to the Greek Archbishop a copy of The Serbian Christian Heritage of America, a monumental book of the spiritual and cultural presence of the Serbian Diaspora in North America, published in celebration of the jubilee year and the 800th anniversary of the autocephaly of the Serbian Orthodox Church.

While the closing prayer served as a formal ending to the luncheon and banquet, clergy and faithful from throughout this vast diocese enjoyed in their fellowship with one another throughout the afternoon hours. The 2019 Diocesan Days came to a close but will continue tomorrow and on Sunday and every liturgy whenever we remember our Bishop Maxim in our prayers. For then will we remember the priests and monastics and faithful from throughout this God protected Diocese and the many blessings we receive from the Lord who has planted this vineyard and continues to perfect it.

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- Source: westsrbdio.org