

16/09/2019

Archbishop Elpidophoros of America: 'The more fully that we die to this world, the more fully Christ lives in us'



**Homily
of His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros of America
Archieratical Divine Liturgy
Sunday after the Exaltation of the Cross**

Annunciation Greek Orthodox Cathedral of New England
Boston, Massachusetts
September 15, 2019

My Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Today, we have heard the Gospel in the clearest terms. It is a call to live and to die; to be buried with Christ and to be born again in Him. This call is summed up in the image of the Cross.

“If anyone wishes to come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake and the Gospel’s will save it.” (Mark 8:34-35)

The world of mankind is a fallen world. It is sick and dying: wounded by sin, and cut off from God, who is the source of life. For this reason, Christ says that we live amongst “an adulterous and sinful generation” (Mark 8:28). It is a world poisoned by illusions and delusions, ruled by the father of lies, the Devil.

The Gospel calls for us to die to this dying world. Christ teaches us to renounce vain desires and empty ambition. We put aside pride and greed, envy and anger. We seek instead to acquire humility and patience, purity and self-control. “Put to death what is earthly in you,” says Saint Paul in his Letter to the Colossians (3:5). We crucify in ourselves every deed and desire that is opposed to God. This is what it means to take up our cross. To follow Christ, to imitate His love and His mercy—this requires a struggle within ourselves, and with the forces of darkness around us.

The Christian Faith is not an easy faith. If we lack a sense of daily struggle, we are missing something. Human nature wants to reduce the spiritual life to a simple formula, to rules and routines. For this reason, we heard Saint Paul today saying: “a man is not justified by deeds of the law, but through faith in Jesus Christ” (Galatians 2:16). “I died to the law,” Saint Paul says, “so that I might live to God” (Galatians 2:19).

This, my brothers and sisters, is the Gospel: a call to die, and also to live a new life. That new life is one in which Christ Himself lives in us. His strength becomes our strength. His joy becomes our joy. His endless and encompassing love becomes our love. The more fully that we die to this world, the more fully Christ lives in us.

This is the lesson of the martyrs. Today we remember Saint Nikitas the Great-

Martyr. He lived in the fourth century, among the tribes called the Goths. In a time of persecution, Saint Nikitas spoke up boldly on behalf of the Faith and his fellow Christians. For this, he suffered many tortures and finally, death by fire. He became like another Christ, giving up his life for God. For this, he received the crown of glory and a place with the Lord on high. He took up his cross fully, denied himself completely, and died to this world gladly. Now he lives and reigns with Christ forever in the Kingdom that has no end.

The Lord said: "If anyone wishes to come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." If we live according to this world and its ways, we are already dying. If we live according to Christ, we enter an existence in which death is no longer an ending, but a beginning to a greater and higher life with God.

My dear spiritual children:

Make firm your commitment to die daily to this sinful world, and to live anew by following Christ and His commandments. Let His Holy Cross be your beacon, your guidepost, your spiritual weapon, and your ladder to heaven. May the Lord grant us this grace, through the intercessions of Saint Nikitas and of all the saints.

And may the Lord bless and keep this wonderful cathedral parish always! Amen.

- Source: goarch.org