14/04/2026

Sts. Catherine and George Church welcomes Archbishop Elpidophoros for Vesperal Liturgy of Holy Saturday in Astoria, NY



The community of Sts. Catherine and George Greek Orthodox Church in Astoria, New York welcomed His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros of America on the morning of Saturday, April 11, for the Vesperal Divine Liturgy of Saint Basil the Great —the Liturgy of the First Resurrection. Celebrating alongside His Eminence were His Grace Bishop Athenagoras of Nazianzos, Archiepiscopal Vicar of the Hellenic Orthodox Community of Astoria, and the V. Rev. Arch. Pedro Gomez.

In his homily, the Archbishop reflected on the unique character of this Sabbath of Sabbaths — a day of profound stillness in which the Lord rests in the Tomb, yet is profoundly active in the salvation of the universe. His Eminence noted the remarkable paradox at the heart of the service: that the Church begins its

triumphal proclamation of the Risen Lord while He still sleeps in the Grave, two days into His three-day burial.

“Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen,” Archbishop Elpidophoros said, quoting St. Paul. “We can only see this through the Holy Icons, and in the Images of Scripture–that is why our participation in the Liturgy of the Church is so important, because it contains the key to unlocking the door of perceiving our spiritual stature before the Lord.”

His Eminence closed by reflecting on the prayer of the Proskomidi, in which Christ is described as simultaneously in the Tomb with His body, in Hades with His soul, in Paradise with the Thief, and upon the throne with the Father and the Spirit. “In death He transcends every limitation of space and time,” Archbishop Elpidophoros said. “And by descending into the realm of the dead, He offers them the same eternal life that He offers us. No one is left behind.”



Read His Eminence’s full homily here

On Great and Holy Saturday the Orthodox Church commemorates the burial of Christ and His descent into Hades. It is the day between the Crucifixion of our Lord and His glorious Resurrection. The Liturgy held on the morning of Holy and Great Saturday is that of Saint Basil the Great, and begins with Vespers. Because the Vespers portion of the service belongs to the next day—Pascha—the burial hymns

of Saturday are mingled with those of the Resurrection, so that this service is already full of the coming Paschal joy.

Photos by Orthodox Observer/Dimitrios Panagos

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