

HCHC celebrates Great Vespers of the Holy Cross, Academic Convocation



Students, faculty, friends, and alumni of Hellenic College Holy Cross (HCHC) gathered on the evening of September 13th to celebrate Great Vespers for the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross and witness the traditional stavrophoria and rassophoria ceremonies performed with the pastoral blessing of His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros of America.

Also present in the Holy Cross Chapel and participating in the conferral ceremonies were His Eminence Metropolitan Savas of Pittsburgh, His Eminence Metropolitan Gerasimos of San Francisco, His Eminence Metropolitan Nathanael of Chicago, His Grace Bishop Athenagoras of Nazianzos, and His Grace Bishop Anthony of Synada.

At the conclusion of Great Vespers, Archbishop Elpidophoros offered a homily reflecting on the “wisdom” of the Holy Cross. Referencing Proverbs 3:18, read aloud only moments earlier, His Eminence counseled that “If Wisdom is such a Tree of Life, then let us pause for a moment beneath Her shade, to contemplate Her branches, leaves, and fruit. For this Tree of Life is none other than the Holy Cross.”

The Tree of the Holy Cross, His Eminence continued, revealed “something that was discarded; that was overlooked by the mighty of this world. And indeed, true Wisdom is disdained by those who seek only their own advantage,” for true wisdom alone “is manifest in Χριστὸν Ἐσταυρωμένον – Christ Crucified!”

Addressing the seminarians soon to receive their cross or exorasson, His Eminence reminded them that “each of these symbolizes the Tree of Life, the Tree of Wisdom, the Tree of the Cross to which you are dedicated, and whose Sophia exceeds every thought, every concept, every view. Allow this Wisdom to transform you from the inside out.”

During the stavrophoria and rassophoria ceremonies, 29 seminarians beginning their second year of studies received the cross, and seventeen seminarians beginning their final year of studies received the exorasson. Nine HCHC students were also made readers by His Eminence.

After the conferral ceremonies, the HCHC community gathered in the Maliotis Cultural Center for the 2026 Academic Convocation. Following a processional performed by the St. Romanos the Melodist Byzantine Choir, V. Rev. Archim. Dr. Bartholomew Mercado, Interim Dean of Students and Chaplain at HCHC, offered welcoming remarks. Rev. Fr. Michael Lambakis, Interim President of HCHC, and Dr. Nicholas Ganson, Dean of Hellenic College, spoke afterwards. Each emphasized that the mission of HCHC is to educate the future of the Orthodox Church both in this country and throughout the world.

Rev. Dr. Eugen Pentiuc, Dean of the Holy Cross School of Theology, delivered the Convocation Address.

“Never before have we had such immediate access to knowledge,” Fr. Pentiuc observed. Yet now more than ever we are called to ask ourselves: What is education for? “The biggest crisis of education today,” Fr. Pentiuc declared, “is teleological.” We receive education “in order to offer and give” to others what we have received, “to become the priests and offerings” of our own lives. Fr. Pentiuc ended his address by affirming that “the Cross is the pattern and symbol of our education at this school.”

The evening concluded with the Pastoral Address and Benediction of His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros. His Eminence noted with delight that HCHC welcomes this year the largest incoming class of students in its history. HCHC “exists to form persons,” His Eminence said, echoing the remarks of Fr. Pentiuc, “made for love, communion, sacrifice, and repentance.”

To underscore this point, Archbishop Elpidophoros revealed on-stage a late 14th Century euchologion from Constantinople, anonymously donated to the Archbishop Iakovos Library at HCHC through the tireless efforts of Fr. Bartholomew Mercado. His Eminence presented the book to Dr. Menios Papadimitriou, the newly appointed Director of the Archbishop Iakovos Library. “The marks upon its pages,” His Eminence reflected, “are traces of persons who lived, learned, worked, and prayed”—a treasure of inestimable and irreplaceable value.

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