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Daytona Beach St. Demetrios' Blessing of Waters at DeLeon Springs State Park



DELEON SPRINGS, FL – St. Demetrios Greek Orthodox Church of Daytona Beach held its annual Blessing of the Waters on January 4 at DeLeon Springs State Park in Florida, the Daytona Beach News-Journal (DBNJ) reported. The ceremony included the traditional diving for the cross usually held on January 6, the Feast of the Epiphany/Theophany when Jesus was baptized in the River Jordan by his cousin St. John the Baptist.

Mark James Sauskojus, 14, retrieved the cross from the water, and told DBNJ, “It felt so good to finally get it. I was paddling and paddling and I saw that I was a little bit ahead of everyone else.”

Though the weather was less than ideal with heavy rain and wind gusts, six teenage boys dipped into the wading pool at DeLeon Springs State Park, DBNJ reported.

“If you catch it, you get a special blessing that lasts a whole year. Once you catch it once, you can’t do it anymore,” Sauskojus told DBNJ.

“Over 30 years ago, Lambros Papalambros, who was a past president of the St. Demetrios parish, saw DeLeon Springs’ green waters as the perfect place to hold the Greek Orthodox tradition,” DBNJ reported, adding that “the country’s best-known Epiphany celebration is in Tarpon Springs, where thousands gather to watch swimmers brave the cool waters at Spring Bayou in hopes of coming up with the cross, a tradition that dates back more than 100 years.”

Fr. Joseph Samaan told DBNJ that “the Daytona church celebrates on the first Saturday of the year so it’s more of a ‘holiday.’ But that doesn’t diminish the importance of the cross diving event, which in part symbolizes the unity of man with nature.”

“If you talk to the boys over the years who’ve caught the cross, each one will tell you in his way that that year was something special. Something distinct. Something important. It’s a distinct honor that someone catches it,” Fr. Samaan said, DBNJ reported.

Sauskojus and his family converted to the Greek Orthodox faith just over two years ago, DBNJ reported, adding that “catching the cross holds an extra special place in their hearts.”

Mark’s mother, Charity Sauskojus told DBNJ, “I found answers that I had been looking for my whole life and hadn’t found anywhere else. It’s pretty amazing him catching it and being here with my family and passing on a faith to my children. I feel emotional about it.”

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