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His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros of America Homily on the Saturday of Lazaros



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Archangel Michael Greek Orthodox Church, Port Washington, New York

Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Today, we are already on the road that is Holy Week, on our way to the Resurrection of Christ. It is a road with twists and turns, with great emotion, expectation, disappointment, sadness, and grievous loss. But it leads to glory!

So it is only fitting that we begin this odyssey with a resurrection, the great miracle of the raising from the dead of Lazaros by our Lord Jesus Christ.

We have returned to the Archangel Michael Church in Port Washington, New York, for a very special reason. Here, for many years now, the Divine Liturgy on the Saturday of Lazaros has been specifically celebrated for persons with special

needs. And even though we must continue to observe the Divine Services in a precautionary and restricted way, I wanted very much to hold fast to this tradition.

We must remember those who need special care and attention, because they are often considered to be weak, by those who forget that God has chosen the weak.[*]

And they are too often unseen and unheard. They need and deserve our advocacy. They need our consideration. They need our love.

They need us to be of help to them, especially in this time of pandemic. They need us to help them live free and unhindered lives, to have the kind of lives we want for ourselves.

So that is why I traveled here with my synodia to Port Washington this morning, to this wonderful Archangel Michael Church, where the ministry to those with special needs began in the Archdiocese. And since then, many parishes have followed with similar ministries of their own.

But today, the Saturday of Lazaros, seems to be the most fitting time, because it inaugurates Holy Week, our most sacred week of the year, and because there is a specific commandment of the Lord that commends all of us to this ministry.

When Lazaros was raised from the dead, he was not as the Lord Who, not many days hence, will raise Himself up by His own power as God. Here is the key difference as told in today's Gospel:

And Lazaros, who to that very moment was dead, emerged with his hands and feet bound together by the charnel linens. His face also had been tightly wrapped and was covered by the face-shroud. [†]

Unlike in the Resurrection of our Lord, whose grave clothes were set to one side, and whose face covering, the soudarion, was folded apart from the rest.[‡]

Lazaros, now alive after four days in the tomb, is still bound with the winding bandages. He needs help. He needs to be loosed. He needs to be set free.

Therefore, when the Lord sees him come forth in this state from the tomb, He commands the bystanders with these words: "Loose him and let him go forth!"[§]

My beloved friends, this commandment is meant for us. The Lord calls us to unbind those whose lives are impeded by barriers not of their own making.

He commands us to step up and provide a way of emancipation for those who need

that extra effort.

He calls us to loose those who are fettered, either in body or mind, and who want to walk in the light of the Lord. But they are restricted by the mortal bonds of this world, just as Lazaros was tightly wrapped in the winding bandages. Lazaros could not free himself and walk to Christ, Who was his dearest friend. Others had to step up and help.

Should we not also grant a degree of freedom to our brothers and sisters who are bound, sometimes far away from our parishes, and need our help to come to partake of the Liturgy, to walk to Christ?

Right now – in this moment when we must observe legal and health restrictions in this crisis, we are all homebound, separated from the Liturgy of the Church. Now we have a tangible experience of what our special needs Faithful know every Sunday of the year.

It is my fervent prayer that when we are able to return to a regular Church life, that we will not forget those with special needs in our own community and in our general public. Like Lazaros, they often do not speak on their own behalf.

But they are as worthy of our love and attention as the dearest members of our own families. Because we are one family, the family of God.

I pray fervently that this Holy Week will be a blessing to you, and you will be a blessing to others. May you open your hearts to the Divine Presence which is “everywhere present and fills all things.” And may you find space in your hearts for the special needs of our special brothers and sisters. You will discover that through your acts of kindness and love, the miracle of the Resurrection will become your very own, in deed and in truth.

Καλή Δύναμη, καὶ Καλή Ἀνάσταση!

[*] Cf. I Corinthians 1:27.

[†] John 11:44.

[‡] Cf. John 20:6,7.

[§] John 11:44.

— Source: goarch.org