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His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros of America - Homily for the Royal Hours and Vespers of the Descent from the Cross Holy and Great Friday



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April 17, 2020

Archdiocese Chapel of Saint Paul, New York, New York

Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

We have arrived at a grim, yet gentle moment in our challenging journey to Pascha. We have passed through the Matins of Holy Friday that we served last night - hearing the Twelve Gospels that tell the story of our Lord's love for us.

And we have just passed through the Great and Royal Hours of Holy Friday, that re-live the Betrayal, Arrest, Trial, Torture, Crucifixion, and Death in the flesh of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We heard again the awesome Σήμερον Κρεμᾶται, that speaks of the One hanging on the Cross, Who suspended the earth in the midst of the waters.

Who receives a crown of thorns, though He is the King of the Angels.

Who is clothed in the purple of mockery, though He adorns the sky with the clouds.

Who is struck by His own creation, though He freed Adam in the Jordan.

Who is hammered through with nails, though He is the Bridegroom of the Church.

Who is pierced by a lance, though He is the Son of the Virgin.

In these moments when we recount Τὰ Πάθη Του – His Holy Passion, we can do nothing less than bow down and worship with body, mind, and soul; and implore Him to show us His Resurrection.

But in the μεταξύ of our Lord's dying and rising again, there is this three-day pause that commences with the Service we call Ἀποκαθήλωσις, the Descent of the Body of the Lord from the Cross.

It is a most grim and frightening moment, but one that has gentleness, loving-kindness, and deeply sorrowful care. The kind of care that only parents could give an only-begotten child at an untimely and unjust death.

Our Lord's earthly father, Joseph, was no longer alive. Therefore, another Joseph had to emerge from the shadows of fear, and serve Him as a father.

So it was that Joseph of Arimathea came forward, although he had much to lose. He was a rich man who gave his tomb to Jesus.^[*] He was a member of the Sanhedrin who had not agreed with their actions against the Lord.^[†] But he found the courage to go to Pilate, the Roman Procurator who had ordered the crucifixion of the Lord, and begged for His Body.

Here is love! Here is courage! Here is faith in a coming dawn when there is only darkness before your eyes!

Behold, none of the remaining Eleven Disciples showed such faith, such courage, or such love. They were in hiding, cowering for fear of exposure. They were afraid.

And it is true, my beloved Faithful, that fear is the opposite of love. It's not hatred. Hatred is a perverted and twisted form of love. This is why John, the Disciple of love, says: "Perfect love casts our fear."^[‡]

The miracle of this moment, when it took such bravery to take the naked, lifeless Body of the Lord down from the Cross, is love.

And that is why I say – for all its horror and grim sadness, there is yet a gentle, caring, and loving quality to this moment.

For those who pulled the nails out of His hands and feet,

Who lifted the thorny crown from His brow,

Who wiped the blood from His wounded head, His scourged back, His pierced side, His nailed hands and feet.

And, as we chant ... σινδόνι καθαρᾷ εἰλήσας καὶ ἀρώμασιν, ἐν μνήματι καινῷ κηδεύσας ἀπέθετο ... wrapped Him in clean shroud, and laid Him in new tomb.

If there is any lesson for us in this mystical moment today, it is that in the worst conditions, when all hope seems lost, it is love that will give us the courage to press on.

It is love that will steel our wills to do what is right, what is just, and what is needful.

It is love that will cast our fears away and overcome all our doubts.

We see it all around us in the doctors and nurses who love their fellow human beings more than they fear the coronavirus. We see it in the countless public servants who still do their often mundane jobs so that life can go on for the rest of us.

And I pray, that with the Lord's grace we will see this love in ourselves and share it with one another, for it is the bridge that crosses the abyss between death and life, between Hell and Heaven, and leads from Golgotha to the Empty Tomb on the glorious morning of the Resurrection.

Καλή Ἀνάσταση!

[\[*\]](#) Cf. Isaiah 53:9.

[\[†\]](#) Cf. Luke 23:51.

[\[‡\]](#) I John 4:18.

[Source](#)