

14/05/2020

His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros Homily for the Feast of Mid-Pentecost



Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Χριστὸς Ἀνέστη! [and in response: Ἀληθῶς Ἀνέστη!]

Christ is Risen! [and in response: Truly He is Risen!]

We have reached the milestone halfway between the Holy Pascha and the Feast of Pentecost. We are, as today's Gospel says, τῆς ἑορτῆς μεσοῦσης, "in the middle of the feast," at the midpoint when the Lord teaches the meaning of His actions.

In this middle ground, when the Lord was being challenged for the Sabbath-day healing at the Pool of Bethesda, which we just observed last Sunday, He came forward with an even greater challenge.

Μὴ κρίνετε κατ' ὄψιν, ἀλλὰ τὴν δικαίαν κρίσιν κρίνατε.

Judge not according to appearance, but judge with a righteous judgment![*]

Here is where the miracle of the moment becomes the education for eternity. To the Judeans who valued the Temple and its complex so much, for Jesus to violate the Sabbath was unforgiveable. But the Lord demonstrated from the Torah – from the Old Testament itself, the hypocrisy of their position:

“I performed one deed,[†] and all of you are amazed because of it. Moses gave you circumcision, not that it originated with Moses, but with the patriarchs.[‡] Yet, you circumcise a man on the Sabbath. Now if a man can receive circumcision on the Sabbath so as not to annul the Law of Moses, why are you angry with me because I healed an entire man on the Sabbath?”[§]

So we see hear how the Lord distinguishes between the substance of the faith, and the surface of religion.

This is an important and a positive message for us, especially in this difficult time of the pandemic. There are some, who out of their fears and anxiety, cling to the form of religion, just as these contemporaries of our Lord did. They have been blinded to the meaning of our customs, symbols, and practices, because they find comfort in such external forms.

But the Lord calls us to “judge a righteous judgment,” not based on a superficial read of our faith, but on the deeper significance of what our faith means.

Especially as we enter into a time when we have to reopen our Churches around the country on different timetables, and with different legal and public health requirements, we are going to be challenged to live our faith authentically and deeply.

This is not a time for cosmetic Orthodoxy, a simplistic observance of mere custom. This is a moment – a καιρός – a time for us to be radical, which as you know means to go to the root, the essence, the core and the very heart of our Tradition, with a capital “T.”

To do this with wisdom and prudence, with σωφροσύνη, by being good stewards of our Tradition.

What does the Lord say of such?

Every scholar who is learned in the Kingdom of Heaven is like a person who is the master of their own house, who can draw out of their vault treasures, both new and old.[**]

Therefore, we also must be “learned in the Kingdom of Heaven” and be prepared to bring forth treasures that are both new and old to meet the conditions that confront us.

The Lord will grant us the wisdom and the vision. We are called to be honest and humble as we make the decisions that will bring our faith back “online” to all our people in righteousness.

Amen.

Χριστὸς Ἀνέστη! [Ἀληθῶς Ἀνέστη!]

[*] John 7:24.

[†] The healing of the man at the Pool of Bethesda in John 5.

[‡] Literally, “fathers.”

[§] John 7:21-23.

[**] Matthew 13:52.

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