03/06/2020

His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros Direct Archdiocese Clergy Syndesmos Address



June 1, 2020
Via Zoom
New York, New York

Your Grace(s),
Reverend Chancellor,
Reverend Fathers
Beloved Brothers in Christ,
Together, we have traveled a very long road from the beginning of this past Lent and the beginning of this pandemic crisis. Before I say anything else, I want to express to all of you my deep appreciation to you, your Presvyteres, and your families, for the sacrifices that you have made these past few months for the sake of our Faith, and for the sake of our Faithful.

The road that we have traversed together has been a difficult one indeed. Our collective ministry has been one not dissimilar to that of the Holy Forerunner, John the Baptist: “to make the crooked straight and the rough places smooth.”

What is crooked that needs to be straightened? The misunderstandings around what is needful in these times of so many restrictions. What is rough that needs to be smoothed? The minds and emotions of our Faithful, because they have been spiritually roughed up by the loss of loved ones and friends, and by the loss of their way of life and livelihood. Moreover, their faith in the institution of the Church, in the efficacy of the Sacraments, has been shaken. And for some of them, to the very core of their being.

That is why our spiritual task at this moment is preparatory in nature. We must prepare for the return to a greater degree of normalcy, even if it is only by small degrees over time.

We must remain vigilant that our Orthodoxy and our Orthopraxy are sustained through this time. We are facing many challenges to our traditional practices and rituals as we reopen. I want to assure all of you, that I and all the Hierarchs are consulting with the best legal and public health sources to determine how best to preserve our traditions. The glory of America is its insistence on religious liberty, and we are taking measures to meet local governmental requirements that are placing inequitable and unconstitutional burdens on the Church.

We must, and we will, insist that the free exercise of religion – guaranteed by the First Amendment – cannot be limited unduly or unreasonably by government. As you know, I am a member of Governor Cuomo's New York Forward Interfaith Advisory Council, and have already participated in our first meeting. From what I have seen, I am confident that our religious rights and the rights of all our fellow citizens will be respected and protected.

And yes, we are making accommodations to current conditions, and we earnestly pray that we will not see a resurgence of the virus. Step by step, we can return to all or most of the Church life that we knew before the pandemic. What will register permanently for us and our Faithful is the historical record of how we have acted and reacted to the crisis.

Too many voices are taking advantage of this delicate time to promote their own version of the Gospel. In truth they promote their own egos. Whether by assuming the rule of super-martyrs for the Faith or super-rationalists for Science, they seek to oppose the members of the Body of Christ against each other. I ask you: is this the mission of the Holy Priesthood?

Our vocation is to serve the Body of Christ – the entire Body and see that Its members are knit together like a person's limbs – by love, mutual respect, honor, and understanding.

That is how we will honor our priesthood – not only in this time of the pandemic, but in every time and place.

My brothers, you are fighting the good fight and you are fighting valiantly. I bless you and I thank you for your efforts. Let us not let up in our struggle, for as the Apostle reminds us, "now is our salvation nearer than when we first believed."

Through the prayers of the Holy Theotokos and all the Saints, may we hold our course steady, and shepherd our flocks into the verdant pastures of the Chief Shepherd, Who both feeds His flock, and is at the same time, the very food for our souls.

Amen.

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