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His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros of America – Homily for the Eighth Sunday of Matthew



Homily for the Eighth Sunday of Matthew
August 2, 2020
Kimisis Tis Theotokou Greek Orthodox Church
Danbury, CT

Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I am delighted to be with you today, especially in this period of the Δεκαπενταύγουστο that leads to the celebration of your community's Feastday, the Dormition of the Most Holy Mother of God.

And indeed, this feast belongs not only to those communities who have the Κοίμησις as their special dedication, but to the entire Orthodox world, and the very cosmos itself. For it is a little Pascha, an aftertaste of our Lord Jesus Christ's Resurrection, and a foretaste of our own.

That is why we spend these fourteen days in preparation through fasting, to

cleanse our palette, as it were, of all the concerns and worries of this life. We re-focus our attention on the greatest prize of all – the gift of eternal life that the Lord of All grants to us through His Glorious Resurrection.
And we invoke the intercessory power and presence of our Panagia through the Paraklesis services that we chant night after night. This is a short but substantive season of prayer, fasting, and joy. It is a time of spiritual intensity, and prepares us to fully engage our life in Christ throughout the rest of the year, just like the Great and Holy Lent.

During this time of fasting and supplication to the Holy Theotokos, we can take stock of our lives and examine how we are living. Since we have been so restricted for most of this year, we can ask ourselves:
“Are we disconnected from our Church?”
“Do we know the Lord’s teachings and try to implement them in our lives?”
“Have we lived in such a way as to reflect the Lord Jesus Christ to our family, our friends, and our neighbors?”

My beloved Christians,
In the miracle that we read about today in the Holy Gospel, the only miracle that is in each of the Four Gospels, our Lord Jesus fed the Five Thousand, which does not include the women and children who were present – perhaps there were twenty thousand!
This miracle is an icon of the Eucharist, the marvelous multiplication of His Body and Blood throughout the centuries, with no lack ever occurring. Indeed, when the last prayer is read, we always seem to have “twelve baskets full.”

But it is also an image of us, the Church. Think for a moment. As many as twenty thousand people, listening to the Lord through a long afternoon. At day’s end, they are hungry. The Disciples are concerned for these crowds, but they feel helpless when the Lord says to them: “You give them something to eat.” The best they can do is five loaves and two fishes.

The Gospel of John adds a poignant detail that the other Three Gospels omit. It was a young child who offered the bread and the fish, even though his bread was the cheapest, simple barley loaves. This child was not ashamed to give all that he had, even when the Disciples questioned whether his offering could help. And here is why this miracle is so important to our understanding of the Church, and of this Divine Liturgy today.

I ask you, is it a stretch of our understanding to think that the Creator of the Universe, the billions of galaxies that seem to go on forever, that this Creator could

multiply five loaves and two fishes? I think not.

But in blessing these offerings, and lifting them up to the Heavenly Father in front of all the people, the Lord Jesus taught the deepest lesson of all: that of generosity, of compassion, and of care for our neighbor. The young boy led the way, but maybe others followed as well.

What if the miracle was a transformation that took place in the hearts of every person there? What if, when the people saw the generosity of the young child, they opened their hearts, and perhaps their cloaks, to share food they already possessed, with the person sitting next to them? Do not think that this is merely a rational explanation. The transformation of the human heart is greater than any changing of matter from this to that. Here, in this Church of the Κοίμησις today, we behold the transformation of the offering of Bread and Wine into the Very Body and the Very Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. But what of the transformation of our hearts?

My beloved Christians:
Our worship is not a ritual that is only pleasing to God, and indeed it is. Our worship is the way we allow God to change us for the better, to transform us, to perfect us. Through the Divine Liturgy today, you all offered the Bread and the Wine that were changed into the Holy Eucharist. Now I ask you: what will you offer one another?
Mercy? Love? Forgiveness? Patience? Hope? Caring? Compassion?

I pray these and so much more. This is our purpose in worshipping together this day, as it is every time and in every place.

I close with this thought, for you to contemplate and, I hope, truly absorb. The late Metropolitan Anthony Bloom said many times:

“We should try to live in such a way that, if the Gospels were lost, they could be re-written by looking at us.”

My Friends, what could be written about us today?
Through the intercessions of the Holy Theotokos and all the Saints, may we be counted worthy to know the miracle of the human heart, and be the living icons of the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

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