

14/11/2020

## **His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros of America: Homily at the Great Vespers of Saint John Chrysostom**



Saint George Greek Orthodox Church

Ocean, New Jersey

November 12, 2020

Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

On this eve of the Feast of the Patron Saint of your Metropolis, the Holy and Golden-mouthed John Chrysostomos, Archbishop of Constantinople, I extend my warmest best wishes to you and to every soul within this God-saved Eparchy. As the Patriarchal Vicar, I rejoice to celebrate this feast with you, one so great that it was

transferred to this day, so that it would not conflict with the actual day the blessed Saint reposed.

Many are surprised to learn that the Holy Chrysostom reposed on the Feast of the Universal Exaltation of the Holy Cross, September 14th. But because of his momentous importance for the life and liturgy of the Church, his feast was transferred to November 13th.

Perhaps more surprising is the fact that he died in exile, alone, suffering, and without the slightest comfort. But he was the Archbishop of Constantinople, a figure whose magnificent mosaic icon adorns Hagia Sophia. And to this day, we hold him to be the greatest preacher who has ever lived, who was known in his lifetime as Χρυσόστομος, golden-mouthed, because of his eloquence and the 1,447 sermons we still possess.

Just as renown was his amazing command of the Holy Scripture. His commentaries on the Divine Scriptures are exhaustive. He was the author of more works than any other Church Father. He composed commentaries on the Book of Genesis, the Gospels of Saints Matthew and John, the Book of Acts, and all the Epistles of the Holy Apostle Paul. We have 240 of his own letters. And besides his feast today, we also celebrate the translation of his Holy Relics back to Constantinople on January 27th, and his celebration as one of the Three Hierarchs on January 30th, together with Saints Basil the Great and Gregory the Theologian.

So why did he die in exile? How could such an historic figure of the Church be cast aside by Christian civilization?

The answer, my beloved friends, is simple. It was for his honesty, his truthfulness, and his fidelity to the Gospel. For his so-called “crimes” of speaking the truth in love, he was literally marched to death in the harsh terrain leading to the Caucasus Mountains in eastern Pontus.

Politics invaded the Church, as it has so many times in our history. Let us not forget that the order to crucify our Lord Jesus Christ was given by a governor of the Roman Empire. But it is not man who writes the last word in the history books.

It is God.

Therefore, beloved Christians, we must never despair. We must never give up. We must hold on to our hope and to our expectation of the blessing of Almighty God.

Saint John Chrysostom died in exile, but his last words were:

Δόξα τῷ Θεῷ πάντων ἕνεκεν!

Glory to God for everything!

This cry of conviction, this shout of faith, makes me think of the verse from Saint Paul that we read in every funeral service:

For the Lord Himself shall descend from Heaven with a shout, with the voice of the Archangel and with the sound of the trumpet of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first.<sup>[\*]</sup>

Yes, my beloved Christians, the shout of faith that was exclaimed with the Holy Chrysostom's last breath, has resounded to this present day and time, more than sixteen hundred years after his dormition.

The names of his captors, his tormentors and his persecutors are lost in the dustbin of history. But John was received after a mere thirty years back to Constantinople in a glorious golden casket. And before that return in victory and vindication, the People of God were already calling him a Saint of God.

His precious relics were stolen in 1204 by barbaric marauders masking as Christians in the shameful Fourth Crusade, but thanks to our Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, a direct successor to Saint John Chrysostom, these holy relics were returned to Constantinople in 2004, where they were laid to rest once again – this time from the Vatican to the Patriarchal Church of Saint George at the Phanar.

Therefore, tonight, in the midst of our own struggles and temptations, in the midst of our own difficulties and challenges, and in the face of this pandemic and the trials of this world, let us cry aloud with the Saint of God:

Δόξα τῷ Θεῷ πάντων ἕνεκεν!

Ἀμήν.

<sup>[\*]</sup> I Thessalonians 4:16.

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