

Archbishop Elpidophoros of America - Homily on the Thirteenth Sunday of Saint Luke



Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Church, Westfield, New Jersey

Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

“What is impossible with human beings, is possible with God!”

What a message of hope in these difficult days! When we face a resurgence in the pandemic, and the days grow darker as we draw near to Christmas. For it is at the Winter Solstice that the days begin to lengthen again. It is when we celebrate the Light that has come into the world, when the Sun of Righteousness dawns upon us, that the earth is warmed by the longer rays of the sun.

As we draw near to the feast, I am so very pleased to be with you for the Divine Liturgy, especially as your Patriarchal Vicar for the Metropolis of New Jersey. We gather on this Sunday, the day before the Feast of our Ecumenical Patriarchate, to

celebrate the Divine Liturgy, our preeminent act of love and unity.

The Divine Liturgy is an act of possibility, achievable only through the power and energy of God. What the Lord said today to the “ruler” – the ἄρχων of the community – was a challenge that speaks to us as well.

The “ruler” clearly had a problem of conscience. He lacked satisfaction with his religious life. He did live according to goodness and righteousness, observing the obvious commandments of the Law, but he felt that he still lacked something. He tried to mitigate the Lord’s humble yet powerful presence by deferring to Him, calling Him “Διδάσκαλε ἀγαθέ,” – “Good Teacher.” The Lord’s response, “Why do you call Me good?” was the beginning of revealing the “ruler’s” true spiritual condition.

You see, my beloved Christians, it often happens that we go through life, content with our self-understandings that we are “good” people. And in fact, we are not wretchedly evil people – we do our best with the light that is in us. But like the light of the sun that diminishes and increases throughout the year, there are opportunities for us to magnify our spiritual life. Like the “ruler” in today’s Gospel, we can always do more.

For him, it was to make a sacrifice of his possessions. His wealth held him back, so much so that the Lord remarked about how hard it was to enter Heaven for those with so many attachments to this world. But this is precisely the moment when the Lord exclaims: “What is impossible with human beings, is possible with God!”

My dear friends,

It is exactly in the moment when we think that we cannot lift the burden, move the obstacle, fulfill the goal, win the prize – this is the exact moment – the καιρός – when God can act, if we are willing to accept His help.

There was another rich and important man who heard the same words that the young “ruler” did. Although it was a few hundred years later, this young man, who had many possessions, was determined not to simply walk away. He went forth from hearing this Gospel in the Divine Liturgy, sold all his possessions and endowed the poor, and headed out into the desert. You know who he is. You know his name. You know him as Saint Anthony the Great.

Beloved Christians,

Every time we gather in the Divine Service, where the miracle of the Body and

Blood of the Lord happens without fail, this is a moment, a καιρός, when what is impossible for us is possible for God. It is God who accomplishes the transformation of the gifts of bread and wine, in accordance with His own word. And it is God Who can accomplish in our lives a deep and lasting transformation of our hearts and minds.

From fearing to loving. From begrudging to forgiving. From selfishness to generosity. From despair to hope.

Let us embrace the unique challenge that the Lord has set for each of us. Let us not cling to our habits and our comfort zones. Let us not walk away from the possibilities. Let us strive to accept the high calling of Christ, knowing that:

Τὰ ἀδύνατα παρὰ ἀνθρώποις δυνατὰ παρὰ τῷ Θεῷ ἔστιν!

Amen.

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