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## **His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros of America Homily at the Vespers of the Feast of Saint Nicholas the Wonderworker**



December 5, 2020

Saint Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church

Oak Lawn, Illinois

Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I am so very pleased to be with you this evening as we commence the Feast of your Heavenly Patron and the Saint that is known the whole world over - the Holy Archbishop of Myra, the Wonderworker Nicholas. This evening is made even more special by the fact that earlier today, together with your beloved Metropolitan Nathanael and other Hierarchs of our Archdiocese and Ecumenical Patriarchate, including the former Chancellor of Chicago who is now Metropolitan Athenagoras of Mexico, we elevated your former pastor, Bishop Timothy of Hexamilion, to the dignity and grace of the episcopacy.

Indeed, the blessings of Saint Nicholas are many! And why should it not be so? We

call him “the canon of the Faith and the icon of gentleness,” κανόνα πίστεως καὶ εἰκόνα πραότητος, for he is an ever-flowing fountain of Christian virtue and steadfastness.[\*] We all know the story of his participation at the First Ecumenical Council in Nicaea, and how his gentleness was constrained by his canonical adherence to the Faith.

The Holy Nicholas was among the Fathers defending the Faith of the All-Holy Trinity at the First Council convened by Saint Constantine. But in the course of the deliberations, he was overwhelmed with righteous indignation by the outrageous folly of the heretic Arius. In a moment’s time, his gentleness gave way to the rule of Faith, and he actually slapped Arius across the face for his impious suggestion that the Lord Jesus Christ was not, as we recite from the Very Creed that this First Ecumenical Council established, “the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all ages; Light of Light, true God of true God, begotten, not created, of one essence with the Father, through Whom all things were made.” [†]

For his righteous slip-up and slap of the heretic, Saint Nicholas was arrested. He was stripped of his episcopal insignia, and even placed in prison! Suddenly he went from being an Archbishop to a common criminal, because physical violence among clergy is strictly prohibited.

But through that night in his lonely prison cell, the Lord Himself and the Virgin appeared to the Saint. She offered to him his episcopal stole, the omophorion, and the Lord presented to him the Holy Book of the Gospels. This vision was seen by many bishops, and some say even the Emperor himself.

And soon, Saint Nicholas was completely restored to his episcopal rank and dignity, and his gentleness was restored as well. For it was not violence that he incited, it was piety, truth and the sense of common decency that the arrogant Arius flaunted with skillful language, like a sophist.

Therefore, my beloved Christians, let us emulate and hold in honor and high esteem the passionate defense of the Faith that Saint Nicholas embodies for all of us and for all time.

Let us remember that his name means “the victory of the people” and that victory does not come except by struggle, hardship, and yes, by virtuous exertion. As the Lord Jesus Himself said in an enigmatic saying from the Gospel of Mathew:

From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven endures violence, and the violent take it by force. [‡]

The violence that the Lord is speaking of is the effort and the internal struggle that every human being makes in their own way to live the life in Christ as best they can, and to be victorious as was Saint Nicholas.

When Saint Nicholas struck Arius, it was not out of hatred or envy. It was out of a desire to stop him from blaspheming the Name of the Lord. He was judged by his peers as being unworthy of his high office, but the Lord Himself and His Holy Mother ruled otherwise. The Court of Heaven is higher, and supreme over any court on earth.

Thus, Saint Nicholas became a gentle and a compassionate intercessor for all of us. For his flock in the days of his episcopacy, and he is a special advocate for those who have fallen asleep. This is noteworthy of the Saint Nicholas National Shrine at Ground Zero in New York, a place where nearly three thousand of our countrymen perished on the fateful day of 9/11.

My beloved brothers and sisters in Christ:

Tonight, let us give thanks to the Lord above for revealing the great Wonderworker and Hierarch Nicholas unto us.

May we always have his prayers as we struggle to be victors through Christ in our lives on earth, and may we have his intercessions when we stand before the dread Judgment Seat of Christ. May we be vindicated through grace as he once was, and welcomed into the mansions of eternity to live with God and all the saints. Amen.

[\*] Apolytikion of Saint Nicholas.

[†] Apolytikion of Saint Nicholas.

[‡] Matthew 11:2.

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