

13/12/2020

## **His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros of America: Homily at the Divine Liturgy on the Sunday of the Holy Forefathers**



December 13, 2020

Saint Thomas Greek Orthodox Church

Cherry Hill, New Jersey

Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I am very glad to be with you this morning for the Divine Service, especially because it was unanticipated. Because of pastoral responsibilities yesterday, I found myself close to Cherry Hill, and I am happy to be with this wonderful community of Saint Thomas so close to the Feast of Christmas. As the Patriarchal Vicar of the Metropolis of New Jersey, it is a great joy to experience the life of this vibrant Metropolis in person.

In fact, today is the Sunday of the Forefathers, which falls on the nearest Sunday between December 11th and the 17th. It is the day on which we remember all the

righteous figures from the Old Testament, whose lives and character revealed, in a prophetic manner, something of the mystery of the Coming of the Christ.

The hymns today sing of the honored fathers of all ages past: Adam, Abel, Seth, Noah, Enoch and Abraham, Melchizedek and Job, Isaac and the faithful Jacob; as well as the daughters of old: Hannah, Judith, Deborah, Huldah, Jaël and Esther, Sarah, Miriam the sister of Moses, Rachel, Rebecca and Ruth the exceedingly wise.

In every case, the lives of these righteous men and women are a manifestation of the plan of God to save the world – His Divine Oikonomia. It is a story of God's outreach to the human family, and His desire to include everyone in His Household and in His Kingdom.

That's why today's Gospel reading is so important. There is something so very forceful about the command of the Οἰκοδεσπότης, the Master of the Estate, when he learns from his servant that the summons to his Banquet has been declined by those invited guests. He commands:

Go out quickly to the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in the poor and maimed and blind and lame. [[\\*](#)]

And when his servant replies, "My Lord, what you commanded has been done, but there is still room," the Householder becomes more urgent and commands:

Go out to the highways and hedges, and compel people to come in, that my house may be filled. [[†](#)]

This insistence and real pressure is not a negative emotion for God; rather, it is a sign of His love for every single human being in this world of ours. Everyone – the billions of souls whom we will never know, God wants them all at His Table in the Kingdom. When we hear of "the poor and maimed and blind and lame," we should understand these conditions as being those of the soul and heart.

There are people with a great deal of money in their pockets, but who are paupers in their souls. There are people who have been so hurt by the world and the others in their lives, that they cannot make their way to be loving, decent, and good. There are those who are blind to the truth about themselves, and therefore they cannot see the needs of others. And there are still others who have self-inflicted wounds of selfishness and greed that make it hard for them to reach out to others.

But these are the very people that God wants, because He wants us all.

My beloved Christians:

This Christmas, let us be like the Holy Forefathers and Foremothers whom we celebrate this day. They sought to bring others to God, and we can do the same. With a simple loving word, with a phone call to someone we have ignored, with an invitation that is overdue. Even as we continue to protect ourselves and others in this time of pandemic, we can still reach out and spread the message of God's inclusive and embracing love in the world, in the little world that each of us inhabits daily.

May the Lord Who is Coming to be Born in Bethlehem of Judea grant unto us a blessed Feast of His Holy Nativity, and grant unto us a safe, prosperous and healthy New Year. Amen.

[\[\\*\]](#) Luke 14:21.

[\[†\]](#) Luke 14:23.

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