

09/02/2021

Welcome Address of Rev. Economos Evagoras Constantinides to His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros of America



Your Eminence,

On behalf of the historic Cathedral of Saints Constantine and Helen, I would like to welcome you today as you lead us in prayer. Even though we are few today due to the pandemic, and even fewer due to the snow, we are a community full of love for you, our Spiritual Father and Archbishop. I would also like to welcome the Very Rev. Archimandrite Vassilios Drossos, a classmate of my Fathers from Seminary, who has become a close friend and mentor these past years. We welcome Archdeacon Dionysios, a fellow Camp Saint Paul Staff member and good friend, and Deacon Michael, a Schoolmate with whom I have forged a dear friendship through our previous service to the Archdiocese. Thank you all for being here.

I would like to also thank each of you for being here and for braving the snow. Thank you to our Board of Trustees President Haralambos Paloumbis, who celebrates his Saint's feastday this week. I want to thank Archon Petros Vlitas, who is also an Archdiocesan Council member, for arranging all of today's logistics. Thank you and congratulations to all of our Board Members, new and old.

Thank you to our Ladies Philoptochos Society, the Frezoulis family, our A. Fantis Students, our beautiful chanters and everyone who made today so special.

Your Eminence, over 100 years ago, the Greek residents of Brooklyn would routinely travel over the bridge on Sunday mornings to attend the Divine Liturgy at one of the Parishes in Manhattan. Eventually, they decided to establish this, the first parish on Long Island, in 1913. Since then, this historic Cathedral has been an active part of the Greek Orthodox story in the United States. It was here that the papers for the incorporation of the Archdiocese were signed almost 100 years ago. This community opened one of the first Greek Parochial Schools, A. Fantis, which is still operational and successful to this day. In fact, allow me to prove the importance of our Greek Parochial School System with this fact: over three quarters of our Board of Trustees, and our entire current Executive Board are graduates of A. Fantis. These men and women have stayed here and reinvested in their community. This community has hosted dignitaries and prominent Hierarchs including both Archbishop Makarios of Cyprus in 1954 and Archbishop Ieronymos of Athens in 2013. And in 2001, after the devastating events of 9/11, this Cathedral became and remains to this day the temporary spiritual home to the faithful of Saint Nicholas at Ground Zero, and their priest, the ever-memorable Father John Romas of blessed memory. At each Divine Liturgy, when we sing the Apolytikion of our parish, we sing both the apolytikia of Saints Constantine and Helen and Saint Nicholas, a tradition we have observed for 20 years, and we will continue this until the doors of Saint Nicholas National Shrine at the World Trade Center are open again to the whole world for worship and prayer.

Your Eminence, I was appointed to be the Dean and Proistamenos of this Cathedral a little over two years ago, and Maria and I, along with our two young boys, immediately moved here and began a new life. For almost ten years prior to that, I served the Archdiocese in a variety of roles, most significantly as the Director of Ionian Village, which was one of the most rewarding positions of my life. Unfortunately, though, my demanding travel and inconsistent parish schedule proved difficult, and one day bubbled over in the form of a question from my oldest son Christopher, to Maria: "Why don't we ever get to go to church with Baba?" It was then that we began to look for a place to call home.

In an all-too-coincidental set of circumstances, we ended up here in the Fall of 2018. Since then have been welcomed by this community wholeheartedly. As Your Eminence knows, it is not always easy to go somewhere new, where you don't really know anyone. From day one, both the Saints Constantine and Helen and A. Fantis communities have shown us so much love and warmth. They have welcomed us into their church, their school, and their families...and as such, have become our family.

Almost one year ago, Your Eminence, you called on me to again serve the Archdiocese in an exciting capacity as its Spokesman. Since March of last year, I have been by your side, observing as you navigated not only the first year of your Archpastorate in America, but at the same time a colliding and deadly global pandemic. Your sense of calm and peace have served as an example in my own life and ministry of the way a Spiritual Leader must conduct himself. I have watched as you have been confronted with challenges, opposition and criticism, and yes, even pure hate from some, especially online. And yet, Your Eminence, you continue to provide to us the image of the Good Shephard. You know your faithful and are confident that the faithful know you. They know you through your actions and words, your ever-present smile, and your message of love, understanding and tolerance for all people. You have not cowered in the face of hired hand or the wolf, for you know your people – your faithful – and you truly love them, and they know and love you. It is through your example that you show us how to confront the difficulties in our lives and our world, and most importantly, what it means to live a life worthy of Jesus Christ.

Your Eminence, today, as you have bestowed this cross on me, I want to thank you for two very specific things:

I want to thank you for the trust that you have placed in me to serve as the Spokesman of the Archdiocese. This great honor is not just bestowed upon me or

my family, but on our Cathedral Community as well, for the Dean of the Cathedral of Brooklyn speaks on behalf of the Archdiocese. Through this work I have been with you for some truly awe-inspiring moments:

-As you led the first-ever virtual and most-attended Clergy Laity Congress in the history of the Archdiocese, tackling immediate and urgent challenges head on such the financial stability of the Archdiocese, the completion of Saint Nicholas, the future of Hellenic College Holy Cross and the Clergy Pension Plan,

-As you inspired thousands of our clergy, Presbyteres and faithful with your virtual Questions and Answer sessions during Holy Lent, answering questions truthfully, and confronting some very difficult issues,

-When you prayed at the funeral of George Zapantis, the young Greek-American shot in Queens over the summer,

-And of course, when you marched here in Brooklyn in honor and memory of the tragic killing of Breonna Taylor, signifying your steady, compassionate and unrelenting belief that all people were created equal in the eyes of God.

At the same time, I must thank you for the opportunity and blessing to continue my ministry here at Saints Constantine and Helen Cathedral. As I told you a year ago, I will always serve my Archdiocese, but only if I could continue to serve this community. I said it then and will repeat now; this parish, these people have not just become our friends, but our family – and together we journey towards Christ. I pray each day that I can impact their spiritual and worldly lives, and I can attest to you that they have had a deep and abiding impact on my life and the lives of my family. Your Eminence, serving the Archdiocese is an absolute honor, but serving this Cathedral is more than an honor, it is a sacred task, entrusted to me by your loving guidance. It is this community and these blessed people of our Lord who so amazingly fill my cup with the Grace of God each and every day.

So, Your Eminence, I welcome you again today. Welcome to YOUR Cathedral in Brooklyn. We stand ready at any moment to support your ministry with the same zeal, love and hope that you have given to us since your most sacred election to the throne in America. Welcome and AXIOS!

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