

11/04/2021

## **Homily at the Fourth Salutations to the Theotokos by His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros of America**



Saint George Greek Orthodox Church

Clifton, New Jersey

April 9, 2021

Dear and beloved faithful of Saint George,

How far we have come over this past year! From the grim days that we all faced twelve months ago, when the pandemic was spreading out of control. To this Spring, when the hope of the vaccines fills us with optimism for the future.

As an Archdiocese, and as the Metropolis of New Jersey, we have weathered the storm as well as could be expected. But as the Parish of Saint George, like all the parishes across our great country, you have used tremendous resourcefulness and been persistent to keep your parish and the faith alive.

For your courage and stamina throughout this past year, I congratulate you. And I

thank you from the bottom of my heart, for your faithfulness to the traditions of the Church.

The spirit of 1821 is alive in you! And this Bicentennial Year of the Greek Revolution is an inspiration to us all, to hold firm to our traditions and, above all, to our Faith.

That is why I am so very pleased to be with you for this Fourth Stanza of the Salutations to the All-Holy Theotokos. If there is anyone to credit for our survival in these past twelve months, it is the Mother of God

We, who are her children, know to cry to her in the hour of our greatest need. The Akathist Hymn is more than her praises, or the story of her Annunciation and the Nativity of our Lord. The Akathist Hymn is a plea for help in the face of danger and difficulty.

Just as the faithful Christian Orthodox of the Queen of Cities, our beloved Constantinople, stood all night long chanting these stanzas, when their walls were besieged (hence, why we call the Hymn: Ἀκάθιστος), we stand as we salute and petition the Holy Virgin. We stand aright – as we pray in the Divine Liturgy when we say: Στῶμεν καλῶς!

We stand before the Theotokos because she is the greatest defender of the Church. She is defending the Body of her only child – for the Church is the Body of Christ. And we, my beloved brothers and sisters, are her children now, through our faith in her Son. We have been adopted by grace through Baptism, and now she has as many children as there are sands in the sea and stars in the heavens.

Think for a moment of what a mother would give for her child – anything, of course! There is nothing that a mother would not do, not give, or not sacrifice for her child. This is the kind of love that we are called to have as well – the love of a mother for her only child. So tonight, my beloved Christians, we cry out to the Mother of God, who is our Heavenly Mother:

Ὡ πανύμνητε Μῆτερ, ἡ τεκοῦσα τὸν πάντων ἀγίων, ἀγιώτατον Λόγον· δεξαμένηγάρ τὴν νῦν προσφοράν, ἀπὸ πάσης ρῦσαι συμφορᾶς ἅπαντας, καὶ τῆς μελλούσης λύτρωσαι κολάσεως, τοὺς σοὶ βοῶντας· Ἀλληλούια.

O All-hymned Mother, who did bear the Word more holy than all the Saints, receive now our offering, and rescue us all from every calamity, and redeem us from any future torment as we cry to you: Alleluia!

This last prayer of the Akathist Hymn, one whose initial words we repeat three

times with every-growing urgency, expresses our deepest appeal to the Theotokos. Our cry unto her comes from the depths of our souls, from our open hearts and from our sincere lips.

My brothers and sisters, here in the Fourth Week of the Fast, we draw near to the feast of Holy Pascha with her prayers and intercessions to bring us to our goal.

Through her prayers, then, and together with those of the Great Martyr Saint George, may we all pass over the coming Holy Week and attain the Lord's Glorious Resurrection.

Amen.

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