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## **His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros of America Homily for the Third Bridegroom Service**



Matins of Great and Holy Wednesday

Kimisis Tis Theotokou Greek Orthodox Church

Brooklyn, New York

April 27, 2021

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Tonight, we are blessed to hear once again that most beloved hymn of Holy Week that begins:

Κύριε, ἡ ἐν πολλαῖς ἁμαρτίαις περιπεσοῦσα Γυνή...

You know the story. How the sinful Woman came to the house of Simon the Leper – a Pharisee – and entered inside to perform a supreme act of love, devotion and repentance.

Although she had no right to be there, she dared to enter and approach Jesus –

uninvited, unwelcomed and considered as unclean by all those who sat at the table with the Lord.

And then, as if she had no shame or embarrassment, she washed His divine feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. To the shock of all, she even kissed His feet. And then, taking an alabaster jar of very costly myrrh – something that was bought through her sinful life – she broke it open and anointed the feet of the Lord.[1]

Can you imagine what courage and what nerve it took for this nameless woman – who was despised at every level of society for her unsavory life – to walk into the house of that Pharisee?

It is the courage that only comes from love, devotion, and a heart that has been broken and crushed by the grace of God – similar to how grapes are crushed to make the wine that is transformed into the Blood of God at every Liturgy. That is divine grace, the free gift of God.

This Woman, though, violated every norm of her world and time. A woman touching a Rabbi was scandalous enough. How much more so a harlot? She braved the scorn of the religious elite, and she dared to touch the Lord and Master of the Universe.

She did it all in silence; not a word was spoken, only the soft sounds of her sobs. This was the silence of true humility – even as she was being humiliated in the thoughts of the Pharisees, who eyed her with contempt.

This nameless Woman – who is immortalized in the Hymn of Kassiani and forever renown in the Gospel of Saint Luke – is an example for all of us to emulate. Not her sins, but her sincerity. Her genuine love and devotion. Her silent yet powerful witness to the transformative power of recognizing who and what Jesus Christ is.

The question for us, then, is do we truly recognize the Divinity of the Lord, and what that really means for our lives? Do we sense His presence around us at all times? For He is “everywhere present and filling all things.”

This is how we learn what the Pharisee thought of Jesus, when he saw what the Woman did. Listen to the level of his recognition:

“If This Man were a real prophet, He would know who and what kind of woman this is, touching Him! She’s a sinner!” [2]

However, the Pharisee beholds only the surface, where his prejudices deny him his humanity. But Jesus enlightens him when He says:

“Do you see this woman here? I entered your home, and you offered Me no water for My feet. But this woman? She washed My feet with her tears, and dried them with the hairs of her head. You gave Me no kiss. But this woman? From the moment she entered, she has not ceased to caress My feet with kisses. You provided Me no oil to anoint My face. But this woman? She anointed My feet with myrrh. This is why I say to you, her many sins are forgiven, because she loved much. But if you are forgiven only a little, you love only a little.” [3]

And here, my beloved Christians, is the heart of the matter.

If we recognize the Lord, and sense His Divinity throughout all creation – in other people, in nature, in the times and seasons – then we love much. And we can open our hearts to be forgiven for our shortcomings, both great and small.

But, if we believe that we are better than others, that our faults are very small and few, and we despise those whom we consider beneath us, then we shut up our hearts against the love of God. For, as the Beloved Disciple says:

If you do not love your brother whom you have seen, how can you love God whom you have not seen? [4]

Therefore, tonight, Kassiani invites us – through her magnificent hymn – to esteem the Sinful Woman. Not the way of life into which she had fallen, but the life of love for God that came to fill her heart.

And so, may we always strive to emulate her faith in God, her hope for forgiveness, and her love in everything. Amen.

[1] Cf. Luke 7:37-38.

[2] Cf. Luke 7:39.

[3] Cf. Luke 7:44-47.

[4] I John 4:20.

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# Saint Joseph the Hesychast

