

29/04/2021

## **His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros of America Homily for the Service Holy Unction**



Great and Holy Wednesday

Saint Luke Greek Orthodox Church

Broomall, Pennsylvania

April 28, 2021

Beloved Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

I have come to your wonderful parish this evening in order to serve this very special service of Holy Unction with all of you, for the healing of body and soul, and for the forgiveness of our sins.[\*]

This year, we are able to gather in person, even though we are still in the pandemic. But we are grateful for the progress that has been made. And now, we

have all the more reason to resort to the prayers of the church for healing in the world.

The Mystery of Anointing with Holy Oil is a profound and precious petition that has filled our Churches since the days of the Apostles. The use of oil, which is something so very precious in the Holy Land, has a distinct meaning in Holy Week – even if Unction can be used at any time of the year.

In the Garden of Gethsemane, the Lord faced the greatest fears of every human being. The word, “Gethsemane,” means “Olive Press.” This was because the garden was at the base of the Mount of Olives, where the oil was pressed out at harvest time.

But it was in this Garden that the Lord made Himself subject to the pressure that is beyond our imagination. In the Garden of Gethsemane, He took the anxiety, the worry and, ultimately, the fear and revulsion of death that every human being had ever known or would ever know, and He drank it to the dregs.

Listen to what the Lord endured in the Garden of Gethsemane:

Then they arrived at a place called Gethsemane, the “Oil Press.” And Jesus said to the disciples, “Sit here while I pray.” And He took along Peter, Iakovos and John. But then He began to feel overwhelmed by an alarming sense of sadness, and He said to the three, “My very soul is overcome with sorrow, even to death. Stay here, and stay vigilant.” And when Jesus had walked on a little further, He fell to the ground on His face. And Jesus prayed that if it were possible, this moment might pass by Him. He prayed, “Abba! Father, all things are possible for You! This cup You set before Me.... Take it from Me! But not as I will, but as You will.” [†]

And an Angel from Heaven appeared to Him, strengthening Him. As Jesus prayed more intensely, He was wracked with agony. His sweat rained down on the ground like bloody clots.[‡]

What the Lord was experiencing in Gethsemane was not the fear of one man facing death. The cup that He begged His Heavenly Father to have pass from Him was filled with more than His apprehension about His own impending death. It was filled with all the fear, all the foreboding and all the dread that every person has ever felt in the face of death. It is an ineffable act of love. Our Lord Jesus Christ was pressed to such a degree in the Garden, that it was blood that came forth from His divine brow. Not the sweat of Adam.[§] Not the oil of gladness. But the foreshadowing of the bloody Cross.

Let no one believe that the Lord was afraid for Himself. Let us stand in awe of the cup from which He drank, all the way to the Cross and death.

And this is the source of our healing, for as the Prophet said:

He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed.[\*\*]

Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters,

Receive this Unction tonight, not as a mere symbol, but as the mystical power of God's healing – of both body and soul. The Lord brings forth this oil from the Press He entered in Gethsemane and the dregs He drank for our salvation. And thus, you will arrive with the forgiveness of all your sins at the glorious Resurrection not many days from now. Amen.

[\*] Cf. Iakovos (James) 5:14,15.

[†] Mark 14:32-36.

[‡] Luke 22:43-44.

[\$] Cf. Genesis 3:19.

[\*\*] Isaiah 53:5.

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