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His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros of America Homily for the Matins of Great and Holy Thursday



Ss. Sophia, Hope, Faith, and Agape Greek Orthodox Church

Jeffersonville, Pennsylvania

April 28, 2021

Dear Brothers and Sisters in the Lord,

I am so pleased to be in this precious community tonight in order to celebrate the Matins of Holy Thursday with you. Your matronal saints name the very qualities that we desire to achieve in our spiritual lives: Wisdom; Faith; Hope; and Love. How beautiful that every week when you arrive at this temple, you are reminded of these most praiseworthy virtues!

I am joining with you tonight in one of the services of Holy Week that is often

overlooked: the Matins of Holy Thursday, which is sometimes referred to as the “Fourth Bridegroom” Service.

But we do not chant the Hymn of the Bridegroom as if He is coming. Instead, we enter into the narrative of the Mystical Supper, which we celebrate tomorrow morning.

The Gospel that you hear tonight is the report of Saint Luke, and in the Troparion of the Service, we already reference the foot washing.

Each of the Gospels gives us a different and unique point of view of the Mystical Supper, which was both confusing and illuminating for the Disciples. They were expecting a Passover Meal. And the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke suggest very plainly that was the case.

But, there was no lamb and no sacrificial victim. There is no replacement of the Old Covenant, but only fulfillment. For the Lamb of God is our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, Who gives up His own life for the life of the world.

At this Supper, the Lord established the New Covenant in His Blood at the very first Divine Liturgy. In fact, every Liturgy since that night partakes of that same Mystical Supper and brings us to the same spiritual reality, even across all the miles and centuries.

That is why the narrative of the Institution of the Eucharist is not mentioned in the Gospel of John. Instead, we hear of the foot washing of the Disciples by the Lord and the great teachings of the Lord that include: “I am the Vine and you are the branches.”

But in Saint Luke’s account that we read tonight, we hear:

So just as My Father made a covenant with Me for the Kingdom, I make this covenant with you.[*]

The Lord made this covenant with His Disciples and with those who would believe in Him through their preaching. And this means all of us!

This is also why we call the entirety of our Scriptures, the “New Testament,” which is another word for covenant, or Διαθήκη, in Greek.

Thus, my beloved Christians – in wisdom, with faith, hope, and love – you can begin to probe the depths of the Mystery of what we call the “Divine Liturgy.” You can spend a hundred lifetimes attending every Sunday and still not comprehend the

fullness of the majesty and mystery of the Holy Eucharist.

God has made a promise to us – to be with us “until the end of the world.” [†] His New Covenant with us cannot be broken, because God is the very definition of truth.

We are the beneficiaries of that Covenant, and we partake of its legacy every time we participate in the Sacred Body and Precious Blood of the Lord. It is not the blood of animal sacrifices that cleanses us; it is the Blood of God.

This Holy Week, then, let us wisely commune with this faith, in this hope and for the sake of love – a love of God and a love of one another, knowing that “you can have no greater love than this, to sacrifice your life for your friends.” [‡]

Thus, we shall arrive at the Resurrection with joy in our hearts, peace in our minds and salvation in our souls. Amen.

[*] Luke 22:29 (κάγω διατίθεμαι ὑμῖν καθὼς διέθετό μοι ὁ πατήρ μου βασιλείαν)

[†] Matthew 28:20.

[‡] John 15:13.

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