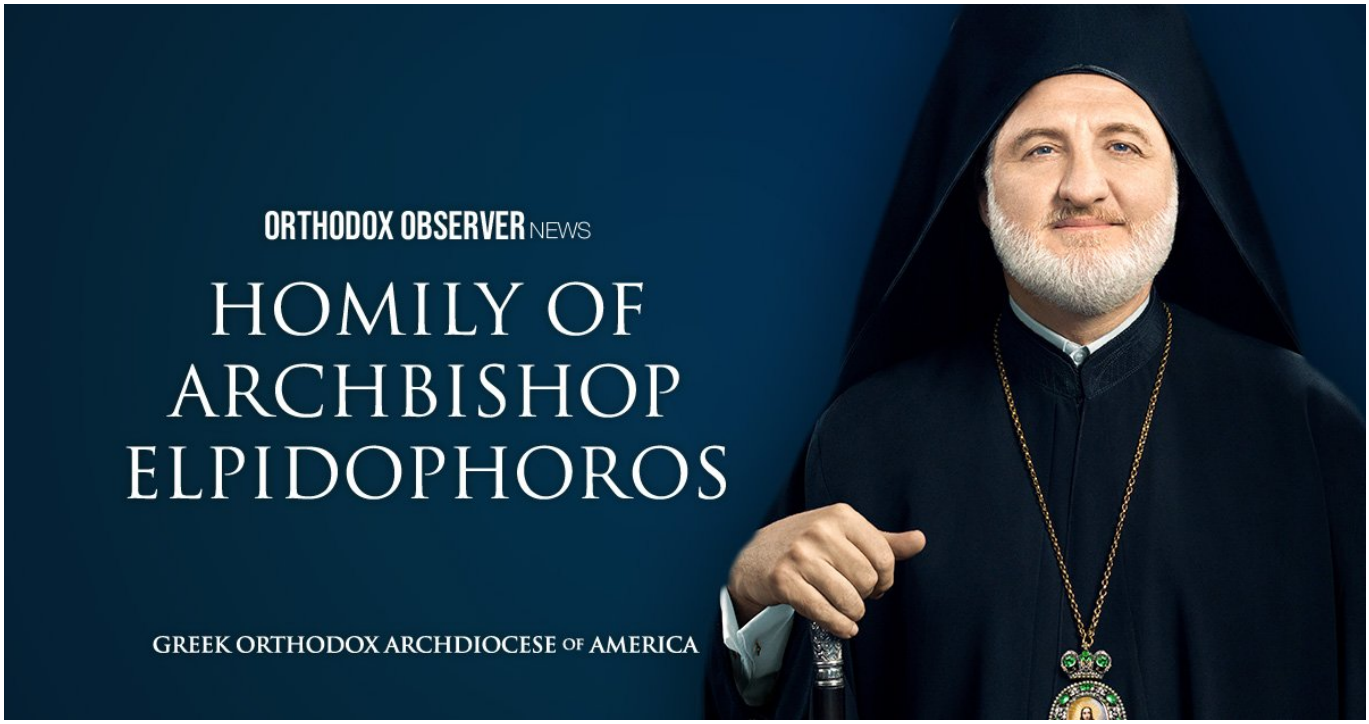
21/05/2021

Homily for the Vespers of Saints Constantine & Helen Saints Constantine and Helen Greek Orthodox Cathedral



Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Χριστὸς Ἀνέστη! [and in response: Ἀληθῶς Ἀνέστη!]

Christ is Risen! [and in response: Truly He is Risen!]

I am delighted to once again be worshipping with you here in this historic Cathedral of Saints Constantine and Helen in Brooklyn. Every time I come here, I sense the great history of our Archdiocese, whose centennial we celebrate next year.

Indeed, this community is living its faith in a way worthy of your patrons. For you are a city within a city, as well as a school for the minds, hearts and souls of your children. Your parish lives up to the best of Orthodox Christian Civilization, which these Equals-to-the-Apostles represent.

Saint Constantine, the first Christian Emperor, and his holy mother, Saint Helen, were powerful forces of transformation for the Roman Empire. While Saint Constantine was moving the Capital of the Empire from Elder Rome to New Rome – the Queen of Cities we know as Constantinople – his beloved mother was securing

the legacy of our Lord in the Holy Land.

And you, the Cathedral that proudly bears their names, are bringing forth the Orthodox Faith of Christ in this incredibly diverse and marvelous civilization we call, “Brooklyn.” And you are securing your legacy by your wonderful programs of education for the children of this parish.

You manifest the best of both of these Saints: engagement with the world, and preservation of the faith.

Saint Constantine transformed the Roman Empire in a generation. It is nothing short of a miracle. The Edict of Milan, which was issued in the year 313 and legalized the Christian Faith for the first time, was the turning point for the Church. It was the beginning of a more than one-thousand-year reign of the Kingdom of God incarnated through human institutions. The famous historian, Sir Steven Runciman called it, the “noble experiment.”

In every liturgy at the Cathedral, in every student who comes to be filled with knowledge and love, in every gathering of this beloved congregation, you continue the life and existence of what Saints Constantine and Helen began so many centuries ago.

You are the inheritors of their dual legacies of the temporal and the eternal. In Saint Constantine, you see the temporal realm of what came to be known as the Byzantine Empire. Its influence on our worship and polity can never be overstated. Everywhere you turn in the Orthodox Church, you see the Eagle that faces west to Rome and east to Constantinople. It is a visible reminder that our Church grew up in an Empire whose greatest aspiration was to signify the Kingdom of Heaven on earth.

And this temporal realm is fulfilled by the influence of Saint Helen, who searched for the footprints of the Lord in the Holy Land. It was she who lived in accord with that verse in the Book of Hebrews that says:

Οὐ γὰρ ἔχομεν ὧδε μένουσαν πόλιν, ἀλλὰ τὴν μέλλουσαν ἐπιζητοῦμεν.

Here we have no abiding city, but we seek one that is to come.[*]

Saint Helen provides the spiritual balance that reminds us we are destined for eternity. When the Empire ended on May 29, 1453, her maternal prayers served as a reason for the everlasting character of Constantinople to live on in the hearts and minds of devout faithful just like you here in Brooklyn.

Therefore, my beloved sisters and brothers in Christ,

Let us celebrate your Heavenly Patrons who changed the course of earthly history and chant with eagerness and love:

Beholding the image of Your Cross in the sky, and like Paul receiving a call not from men, Your apostle among kings placed the imperial city in Your hands, O Lord. Always preserve it in peace, through the supplications of the Theotokos, O You Who alone love mankind. [†]

Χριστὸς Ἀνέστη! [Ἀληθῶς Ἀνέστη!]

[*] Hebrews 13:14.

[†] Apolytikion of the Feast.

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