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Homily at the Divine Liturgy for the Feast the Apostle Bartholomew



Saint Bartholomew's Episcopal Church

New York, New York

June 11, 2021

Beloved Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Christ is in our midst!

Today, in an ecumenical gesture worthy of the occasion, I have the special honor to preside over the Divine Service for the Patronal Feast of His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, Archbishop of Constantinople and New Rome, and Spiritual Father of Orthodox Christianity. This magnificent church dedicated to Saint Bartholomew is truly a precious architectural gem and artistic jewel of both Manhattan and the entire country.

I would like to express my deepest thanks and gratitude to Bishop Andrew Dietsche of the Episcopal Diocese of New York, and especially to the Right Reverend Dean Wolfe, Rector of this extraordinary Parish, for the warm and fraternal welcome that

they have extended to us today.

Some may wonder: Why celebrate the Ecumenical Patriarch's nameday in a church borrowed from another Christian tradition? My dear friends, it's not only the name. Therefore, let me say this in reply:

It is precisely because of the ecumenicity of the First Throne of Orthodoxy, and the faithful and inspiring ecumenical ministry of our Patriarch. His All-Holiness has now served longer on the Throne of the First-Called Apostle than any other Hierarch.

For this alone, this day is most fitting indeed, especially in a church that shares his heavenly patron, the Apostle Bartholomew!

As Orthodox Christians, we are not about exclusivity, but about authenticity. We say with the Lord Jesus Christ, "whoever is not against us is for us!" [*] We openly embrace those who differ from us, not to manifest any compromise, but to extend to others the love and acceptance of Christ.

We are very welcome here indeed, and the honor shown by our Episcopalian brothers and sisters to our Patriarch is a sign that bodes well for the future of the ecumenical movement. By this time, we all know what gulfs separate us. Perhaps, then, we should spend more time focusing on building bridges than on acknowledging walls.

For as the Lord said: "By this shall all people know that you are My disciples, if you love one another." [†] Therefore, this ecumenical commitment stands at the very heart of what it means to be a Christian.

The embellishments of this magnificent church are designed to remind us of the adornments of soul and heart that are the true and essential beauty of the Church.

Thus, I can proudly and joyfully declare that such beauty of soul, heart and mind are to be found nowhere more manifest than in the sacred and most revered person of His All-Holiness our Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew.

He is a living Apostle of love, peace and reconciliation – recognized, of course, with the highest award of Congress.

He has encouraged dialogue, when others would shut their hearts as well as their lips.

He has reached out beyond even the borders of Christendom, to the Abrahamic Faiths, and well beyond these shared legacies.

He has faced the difficulties of the past without giving up even an inch on justice for the oppressed and the downtrodden.

He has engaged his lively and prescient mind to imagine a healthier and different future of coexistence and mutual respect among all religious traditions.

For years, he was “a voice crying aloud in the wilderness”[‡] about the ecological dangers to our world. But his persistence and sincerity have roused religious leaders from the Amazon, to the Aegean and the Arctic Circle, as well as world leaders from Kyoto to Paris. And for his many rallying efforts, His All-Holiness has received – from no less an environmental advocate as former US Vice President Al Gore – the moniker, “The Green Patriarch.”

His All-Holiness has engaged the Orthodox world, imploring that freedom and authentic witness be the standard for the exercise of our faith, and that we not fall into nationalistic schemes and machinations.

In 2016, at the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church held on the island of Crete, our Patriarch led the assembled fathers of the council to choose dialogue and not division – even in the face of nationalist interests that would have interfered with the Council’s deliberations.

For Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, there is no gulf too wide or bridge too far that he is not willing to traverse in order to pursue the love of Christ for each and every human being.

My dear friends, coming to this eponymous church here today is truly a delight and a distinct privilege, as well as a precious opportunity and a challenge.

It is a delight, because this is one of the great ecclesiastical and aesthetic triumphs of our Nation.

And it is a privilege, because genuine ecumenism takes nothing for granted.

However, it is also an opportunity, because the Patronal Feast of His All-Holiness brings us all together.

And it is a challenge as well, because the “Dialogue of Love” and the “Dialogue of Truth” go hand in hand. And thus, there cannot be the one without the other.

Therefore, we celebrate every aspect of this experience bringing the authentic worship of Byzantium into this Byzantine-inspired shrine.

We celebrate the inspired ministry and the sacred person of His All-Holiness, and announce the formation of the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew Foundation. This Endowment Fund has been initiated by the faithful Archons of the Ecumenical Throne – the Order of Saint Andrew.

It is a worldwide effort to ensure that the ministry of the Mother Church of Constantinople will be set upon a firm footing for generations to come. The Foundation will be a rampart around the Mother Church and a bulwark for the life-changing ministry of His All-Holiness and those to follow.

Therefore, let us all acclaim Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew on His Patronal Feast.

And let us joyously cry aloud: Many years, Your All-Holiness!

Ἔτη πολλά, Παναγιώτατε, Πάτερ καὶ Δέσποτα!

Many years, indeed, of health, spiritual prosperity and the grace of God overflowing in Your life, to continue to lead Orthodoxy, Christianity and all people of goodwill to a better life in this world, and in the world to come.

Christ is in our midst!

Who was, and is, and shall ever be.

Amen.

[*] Mark 9:40.

[†] John 13:35.

[‡] John 13:35.

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