28/06/2021

His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros of America Great Vespers of All Saints



Installation of the Rev. Fr. Dimitrios Lee

Sts. Constantine & Helen Greek Orthodox Church of Washington, DC

Silver Spring, Maryland

June 26, 2021

Beloved in Christ,

I am very pleased, indeed, to be at Saints Constantine and Helen this evening. We are gathered to celebrate the Vespers of the Feast of All Saints, and to install your new pastor, Father Dimitrios Lee.

In the readings of tonight, we hear:

Ὑμεῖς ἐμοὶ μάρτυρες, καὶ ἐγὼ Κύριος ὁ Θεός…

You are witnesses to Me, and I am the Lord God …[*]

Thus it is, my friends, that we are all called to be “witnesses” to the Lord, whether we are required to be martyrs or not. This reading, from the Prophet Isaiah, reminds every Christian of their vocation to live a sanctified life, and to join the chorus of All the Saints.

This is why we adorn our Churches with images of the Heavenly Host, the Panagia, the Apostles and Martyrs. The icons are the “family album,” if you will.

Most of you will remember the days when we had special, large books – photo albums – that had pictures of our parents and grandparents. Pictures of important family holidays and family sacraments – baptisms and weddings. From time to time, we would open these books and refresh our memories of our loved ones, of the happier times of our lives.

That is how you should ‘read’ your Church, because all these Saints are part of your families. They are vital members who protect and shield you from evil. They pass on your prayers by their holy intercessions, and provide you with secret answers to those prayers.

But the “cloud of witnesses,” spoken of in the Book of Hebrews, is not only in Heaven.[†] It is here on earth as well.

The Apostle Paul, in His Epistles, writes: “to all the saints who are in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi.” [‡] And he also expresses the same thought, but with a slight twist – writing to “those called to be saints” in both Rome and Corinth.[§]

These salutations give us a glimpse of our mission as Christians. I highly doubt that any of us would ever say: “I am a living saint!” Indeed, even the saints who have lived among us shun such an idea. I can only imagine what Saint Paisios would have declared if someone called him a saint! But we are all “called to be saints,” and called to be among those who have dedicated their lives to God.

And how does this dedication take place? Do you have to become a priest or a monk? Of course not. Certainly, not every priest or monk is a saint.

It is about how we live our lives. Dedication to God is living in accord with God’s values and commandments. And His greatest commandment is to love one another. It’s not the easiest thing to do. Especially when you may not like the

person. But love surpasses our likes and dislikes. It is the way God sees the world, through a lens crafted from His mercy and compassion, His peace and patience, and from His forgiveness and grace.

Here is the life of all the Saints. Here is saintliness that everyone can obtain.

And as you embrace Father Dimitrios this evening, whose task it is to manifest these qualities, and teach them in his every word and deed, know that you are also called to be the witnesses. As we heard the word of the Lord earlier this evening.

'You are witnesses to Him,' by what you say and what you do, and in truth, by what you think. For 'He is the Lord God' Who sees, hears and knows all.

I pray that, together with your new pastor, Father Dimitrios, you will all aspire to the holiness of the Saints, and recognize in yourselves your God-given capacity to live as saints upon earth – united with the Saints of Heaven.

Amen.

[*] Isaiah 43:13 (LXX).

[†] Hebrews 12:1.

[‡] Philippians 1:1.

[§] Romans 1:7 and I Corinthians 1:2.
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