23/07/2021

Archiepiscopal Encyclical on the Day of Mourning for Hagia Sophia



Unto the Most Reverend and Right Reverend Hierarchs, Pious Priests and Deacons, the Monks and Nuns, Presidents and Members of Parish Councils, Honorable Archons of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, Members of Leadership 100, the Day and Afternoon Schools, Philoptochos Societies, the Youth, Greek Orthodox Organizations, and the entirety of the Christ-named Plenitude of the Holy Archdiocese of America,

My Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Ἡ σοφία ᾠκοδόμησεν ἑαυτῇ οἶκον καὶ ὑπήρεισεν στύλους ἑπτά. (Παροιμίαι 9:1)

Wisdom has built herself a house, and has set up seven pillars. (Proverbs 9:1)

One year ago today, the Great Church of Holy Wisdom, our Ἁγία Σοφία, was unnecessarily seized and given over to an alien purpose. This was a grim day for all people of good will and equanimity, because Hagia Sophia is much more than a

sacred space. It is the vision and embodiment of the substance of our Orthodox Christian Faith. As a cultural icon, the Great Church could have been left as a museum. And although this is less than any of us would desire, at least it respected the integrity of the space. But for this past year, in a city which has abundant places for Islamic worship, it was misappropriated and done so in order to send a message to religious minorities, and to appeal to misplaced nationalistic fervor.

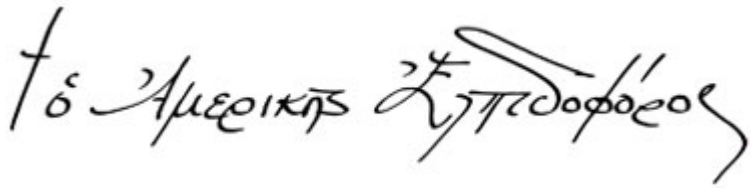
Therefore, we mourn, and not only today, but every day, until a measure of justice is meted out for the Great Church. Every culture and civilization is worthy of respect, and Hagia Sophia, the epitome of the Byzantine achievement, should have been left as a place of cultural intersection and religious harmony. Or, if it was to be restored to worship, it should have been restored to its original intention.

Until such time as our prayers are answered, we must redouble our efforts to bear witness to this House of Wisdom. We must be like the Seven Pillars spoken of in Proverbs, and support Hagia Sophia in every way. Moreover, we must stand with and offer our vigilance to the continuing Great Church of Christ – the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, for it is the See of Saint Andrew that furthers the ecumenical mission and purpose enshrined in the stones of Hagia Sophia.

Yes, today we mourn, but not as those without hope, as the Apostle says (I Thessalonians 4:13), ever expecting the revelation of the hope of the Resurrection in all things; and in our Ἁγία Σοφία as well.

With paternal love in our Lord Jesus Christ,

† ELPIDOPHOROS



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