26/07/2021

His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros Homily for the Fifth Sunday of Saint Matthew



Beloved Sisters and Brothers in the Lord,

I am so proud and happy to be with you today, in this most vibrant, worshipping community of our Greek Orthodox Archdiocese here in Salt Lake City. Unlike the famous “Salt Lake” from which no one can drink, your churches here in Utah are true wellsprings of spiritual refreshment.

As you know, the Great Salt Lake is the largest salt water lake in the Western Hemisphere, and it shares its dense salinity with another famous salty body of water, the Dead Sea, which is where the Sea of Galilee and the River Jordan end.

The Fathers teach us that in these three bodies of water: the Sea of Galilee, the River Jordan, and the Dead Sea, we have a complete picture of the human life. The Sea of Galilee is fresh water, clean and full of life and promise. It provides the water that flows down the River Jordan, which, over time, ends in the Dead Sea; named so, because nothing can live in it.

Thus, our Lord Jesus Christ was baptized in these waters – in the River Jordan, between life and death, to identify with our human condition, in every way, except sin.

Now I say these things not to remind you of any particular meaning for the Great Salt Lake. I say them because this is the way our Holy Orthodox Faith is: it will always relate to the environment in which we find ourselves.

Here in Utah, the Greek Orthodox Faith has prospered, and everywhere I have visited these past, few, wonderful days, I hear nothing but good news concerning all of you.

This is a clear sign that you are living and practicing the Good News of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Gospel is not only the Sacred Reading that we hear in the Church and study at home. The Gospel is our way of life. It is our daily practice of love, compassion, mercy, forgiveness, and generosity toward others.

Even in today's Gospel, a very famous text that speaks of the Gergesene demoniacs, we see how the Lord talks with them, and how He even grants the request of the demons, to enter the herd of swine. I should point out that herding swine would have been a forbidden activity in Judaism, and therefore it is no wonder that the townsfolk asked our Lord to leave after the conclusion to the story. But the greater point is that the Lord was merciful to the demoniacs, and listened to them. There was a high price for their freedom, as there often is, when it comes to human liberation. But we see how our Lord Jesus Christ integrated His message of love, even in a place of death (the tombs inhabited by the demoniacs), and a place of unrighteousness, meaning, the herds of swine.

My dear Christians of this Cathedral:

You are here in this historic community, practicing your faith on the shores of the Great Salt Lake. The very name of the Cathedral bears witness to our Holy Orthodox Faith in the Undivided Trinity, Who is blessed forever and ever.

I know that it may not always be easy to maintain your faith in a region where the dominant religion is something else. But this has always been the challenge, and the glory, of the Church. From a small subset – which was Judaism, an already tiny portion of the Roman Empire, the Faith of Jesus Christ spread across the known world to conquer the Roman Empire. Our faith then transformed Rome into New Rome, still shining at the Phanar, the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople.

Moreover, everywhere in the United States, our faith is a minority faith. But you, the Greek Orthodox of Utah, are an example to the whole Archdiocese. You have prospered and are welcoming of others. You are a bright lamp for others to find their way from spiritual darkness. You are a shining city of God, with open gates like the New Jerusalem.[*]

I pray that you will always be that lamp, and be that shining city. It is your calling, and in fulfilling your vocation, you will both be pleasing to the Lord God, and bring others to His light, to the glory of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit – One God, Who is praised and glorified unto the ages of ages. Amen.

[*] Cf. Revelation 21:25.

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