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His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros Homily for the Feastday of Saint Paraskevi the Great-Martyr



July 26, 2021

Saint Paraskevi Greek Orthodox Monastery

Washington, Texas

Reverend Abbess Paraskevi and

Monastic Sisterhood in Christ,

With great spiritual gladness, I rejoice to celebrate the Feastday of your Heavenly Protector and Advocate, the Holy and Righteous-Martyr, Paraskevi.

Earlier in our prayers and praises, we read the following from her Kontakion:

Τὸν ναόν σου πάνσεμνε, ὡς ἰατρεῖον ψυχικὸν εὑράμενοι…

We find your Temple, O All-Pure One, to be a remedy of our souls…

And here we are! Gathered in the Monastic Enclosure that bears her name. With a spiritual shepherdess that bears her name. With every sign from God that spiritual healing, remedies for soul and body are found here. They are made ready here, in this place, a place of preparation … τόπος τῆς παρασκευῆς.

The Martyr herself, by her very name, demonstrates for all of us the most fundamental truth of our life: that we are always preparing for our death, for our transition from this world to the world to come.

As the Apostle Paul says:

Καθ᾽ ἡμέραν ἀποθνήσκω…

I die daily…[*]

Indeed, Reverend Sisters in the Lord:

The monastic vocation is a calling to philosophy as described by the Socrates, who is often called a 'Christian before Christ.'[†] Socrates names philosophy, "μελέτη θανάτου, a meditation upon death." [‡]

And in the lives of the Holy Monastic Mothers and Fathers of the Church, we see the practice of the "meditation upon death" and the "account before the dread judgment seat of Christ" to be life-giving for the Saints of God.

It gives life because it brings life into focus! With meaning and purpose! What more do we have to do than to follow our Lord Jesus to the Cross, just as Saint Paraskevi followed him to her own martyrdom? Because the Cross is the place of sacrificial love, not of defeat. The sacred τόπος of supreme generosity, because it spares nothing.

The Cross of the Lord is our ladder to Heaven, which has been mounted by the Saints of every generation. Saint Isaac the Syrian knows this all too well, for he says:

His path has been trodden from the ages and from all generations by the cross and by death. … The path of God is a daily cross.

And again he writes:

No one has ascended into Heaven by means of ease, for we know where the way of

ease leads and how it ends. … How is it with you, that the afflictions on the path seem to you to be off the path? Do you not wish to follow the steps of the saints?

But I know, dear Sisters in Christ, that you are here because you do wish to follow in the footsteps of the Saints, especially the Holy Paraskevi, whom we honor this day. Therefore, you live in community with one another and in communion with God, as a sign of contradiction – a σημεῖον ἀντιλεγόμενον to the world.[§]

The Monastic Vocation is needed now more than ever to give balance and perspective to a world obsessed with only this life, and taking as much as possible from it. Power, money, relationships, possessions, status, fame, glory – they all come to an end. But the Monastic knows this from the beginning!

You wear your funeral shroud as a veil even as you breathe the breath of life, because you know that only “the Spirit gives life; the flesh profits nothing.” [**]

My prayer for all of you, on this feast of your Celestial Mistress Paraskevi, is that you may always live in the knowledge of these things, to the benefit of your souls, and the glory of of God. Amen.

[*] I Corinthians 15:31.

[†] Saint Justin Martyr, The First Apology, chapter 46.

[‡] Phaedo, 81α.

[§] Cf. Luke 2:34.

[**] John 6:33.

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