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Aliquippa Parish Celebrates 107th Annual Patronal Feast



The parish of the Holy Prophet Elijah in Aliquippa, Pennsylvania festively celebrated its 107th parish Slava from July 31 through August 2, 2021. After being forced to celebrate its 106th Slava entirely by remote means last year due to the pandemic, the parish community's faithful and friends displayed an eagerness in gathering in person once again to pray, give thanks, and enjoy Christian fellowship to celebrate the continued patronage of the Holy Prophet Elijah over the parish and the families and individuals that comprise it.

The celebration began with the service of Great Vespers on Saturday, July 31 in the parish's beautiful St. Elijah Church. Father Branislav Golic, the parish priest, along with Very Reverend-Stavrofor Dr. Rodney Torbic, the retired parish priest of St. George Serbian Orthodox Church in Carmichaels, Pennsylvania and member of the St. Elijah parish, and the parish's Deacon Daniel August led the faithful in evening

worship to begin the new liturgical day. Responses were sung by the St. Elijah Serbian Church Choir, under the direction of Kathy Loverich.

Sunday, August 1 dawned bright and sunny, with refreshing cool temperatures, as the faithful began to fill the St. Elijah Church for the Divine Liturgy. At 9:30 AM, the St. Elijah Choir began the singing of “Dostojno Jest” (“It is Truly Meet” – Hymn to the Theotokos), marking the entry of our dear archpastor and father, His Grace, Bishop Irinej, into the church. His Grace was greeted by Father Branislav, Father Rodney, and Deacon Daniel, who proceeded to usher him into the church for the Bishop’s vesting and the start of the hierarchical divine service.

Among the faithful in the church waiting to greet His Grace was the honored Slava Kuma, Georgette Brnilovich Osman. Kuma Georgette has been a dedicated, energized steward of the St. Elijah parish for decades. Her infectious enthusiasm for all projects in support of our parish and, especially, our parish’s youth – particularly through her leadership of the parish’s annual church-school summer day camp for the past fifteen years – is well-known and deeply appreciated by our community. And her talents as a baker and cook of traditional Serbian delicacies, which she generously donates for all kinds of parish events, are legendary. A leader both in word and by example, Kuma Georgette truly was a worthy domacica (hostess) for the 107th Slava celebration.

Following the reading of the Holy Gospel by Deacon Daniel, His Grace offered a sermon tied to the day’s reading from St. Matthew, on the healing of the paralytic. His Grace emphasized the importance of connections among the faithful people of God, noting that it was only through the paralytic’s prayerful connection with those around him, who lifted him and brought him to the Lord, that the paralytic received his healing. We, too, must remember that our connections with those around us offer paths to healing by the Lord, His Grace explained. His Grace offered additional examples of the power of connection, prayer and touch, from the life of St. Elijah, whose connection with the widow of Zarephath revealed her faith in God that spared her household from famine and raised her son through the Prophet’s touch. From the life of St. Nicholai (Velimirovich) of Zhicha and Ochrid, whose connection with his beloved friend Bishop William Manning allowed them to communicate even without speaking words. His Grace’s invocation of St. Nicholai’s memory was especially poignant, as it was St. Nicholai himself who in 1952 consecrated the grounds on which the St. Elijah church now stands.

The Divine Liturgy then continued, reaching its apex at the presentation of the Holy Mysteries for Communion. A large number of children and adults came forward to receive the Holy Mysteries from His Grace. After Holy Communion, the faithful

followed the altar servers, cross and banner bearers, clergy, and His Grace outside for the traditional Litija (Procession) around St. Elijah Church. Stops were made by the large group at each side of the church to pray for the parish, the community, and finally, the departed clergy and faithful of the parish. Particularly remembered were His Grace, +Bishop Stefan (Lastavica), the first bishop of the Serbian Orthodox Church's Diocese of Eastern America and Canada (1963-1966), whose remains are buried in the St. Elijah parish cemetery, and three ever-memorable priests who served the parish: +Very Reverend-Stavrophor Vlastimir Tomich, +Very Reverend Protopresbyter Srboljub Bulich, and +Very Reverend-Stavrophor Stevan Stepanov. The procession then concluded in front of the church, where His Grace blessed the traditional Festal Offerings – Slavski Kolach (Festal Bread) and Zhito (wheat) in honor of the Holy Prophet Elijah. A number of small children excitedly gathered around His Grace and Kuma Georgette to assist in turning the Kolach during the blessing, and they were rewarded when Deda Vladika presented each with a flower or leaf of dough that adorned the beautiful bread! His Grace then asked if anyone was willing to serve as the host for the parish's 108th Slava in 2022 – George Milosh accepted the honor by receiving a piece of the Kolach from Kuma Georgette.

Having completed the Heavenly Banquet of the Divine Liturgy, the faithful headed to the parish's picnic grounds to continue the celebration with a festive picnic lunch. This, not only was an appropriate solution in view of the pandemic and took advantage of the favorable weather, but it harkened back decades in the parish's history, when picnics routinely capped off the parish's Slava festivities. The picnic grounds had been cleaned and prepared days before by the parish's Cornerstone Men's Club, and the success of their work was obvious, as faithful and friends filled the tables and seats to enjoy food, drink, fellowship, and the sounds of tamburitza music by "Radost" Orchestra. A delicious meal and an extensive offering of sweets was provided through the efforts of the church-school congregation's Executive Board and various parish ministries and individual volunteers, reflecting a collective effort by the parish as a family to celebrate its familial feast. In lieu of a live program, for the second consecutive year the parish produced a "Virtual Slava Celebration" video program that was played during the picnic and released on Facebook and YouTube: https://youtu.be/qeWL2hLhVuU. Later in the day, winds, sounds of thunder, and rain rolled in, perhaps as a benediction from St. Elijah – the Gromovnik (Thunder-Bearer) – himself.

The festal celebration continued with the Divine Liturgy on Ilindan, the Feast Day of the Holy Prophet Elijah, on Monday, August 2, in the St. Elijah parish church. Several visiting clergy from the Pittsburgh and Cleveland Deaneries of the Diocese

of Eastern America joined with Father Branislav, Father Rodney, and Deacon Daniel to serve the festal liturgy, including Very Reverend-Stavrophor Rade Merick, retired pastor of Holy Resurrection Serbian Orthodox Church in Steubenville, Ohio and Episcopal Deputy of the Diocese of Eastern America; Very Reverend-Stavrophor Rajko Kosic, parish priest of Holy Resurrection Church in Steubenville; Very Reverend Sasa Nedic, parish priest of St. George Church in Carmichaels; Reverend Dragan Vukovic, parish priest of St. Nicholas Serbian Orthodox Church in Johnstown, Pennsylvania; and Reverend Bojan Banovic of Holy Resurrection Serbian Orthodox Church on Raccoon Road in Youngstown, Ohio. Liturgical responses were offered by the faithful in traditional narodno (folk) style as taught by +Prota Stevan Stepanov of blessed memory. Following the liturgy, Father Branislav invited all of the faithful present to the back yard of the parish home, where he and Popadija Dragana graciously offered traditional Serbian hospitality and refreshments under a clear blue sky and comfortable temperatures.

The parish of the Holy Prophet Elijah has had much to be thankful for over its first



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