07/09/2021

25th Annual Diocesan Days gathering – Day Two



Matins and the Holy Hierarchical Divine Liturgy on Saturday, September 4, 2021, the feast day of the Holy Martyr Agathonicus, marked the beginning of the second day of the Diocesan Days Gathering at St. George Church in San Diego. Towards the end of the liturgy all the faithful, following in like manner of His Grace Bishop Maxim, knelt for the prayer of Invocation of the Holy Spirit. Bishop Maxim welcomed everyone at the conclusion of the liturgy noting that through the liturgical celebration everything is illumined. “We offered our thanksgiving, “ he said, “and our deliberations, and the assembly and the many ministries of the Diocese we humbly submit and offer to the Lord. Whether they will be accepted depends exclusively on Him and His love and lovingkindness“.

Following a continental breakfast the bishop, clergy, and delegates made their way to the patio area where this year’s Diocesan Annual Assembly was held. Following the opening prayer, led by His Grace, Ron Radakovich was introduced and invited to run the meeting in place of Debra Tasic. Among the first items on the agenda was the bishop’s address. He noted that all Diocesan parishes and monasteries are

in very good shape despite the pandemic. He thanked the Diocesan staff, the Diocesan Council as well as all clergy and parish boards for their kind hospitality upon his visits throughout the diocese. The bishop noted that the clergy made every effort the past year to accommodate and respond to the challenges of all the faithful during the pandemic and congratulated them for using their discernment and pastoral wisdom.

A great deal of attention was given to one item on the Assembly Agenda, the Clergy, and Diocesan Employee Life and Disability Insurance. Luka Erceg presented the results of hundreds of hours of research on what was intended to be an insurance plan for all Serbia clergy nationwide. Since the other dioceses were not prepared to move forward with this, a motion was made, after lengthy discussion, that our diocese be the first to proceed. The motion was passed. The assembly felt convinced that, in time, the other dioceses would join us and this historic moment towards more quality coverage for our clergy which would, in fact, be a reality of our Serbian Church on this continent.

Host priest, Fr. Bratso Krsic, emceed the banquet at the conclusion of the assembly, which began with an energetic performance by the Morava Folklore Ensemble. During the program, Episcopal Deputy and Chancellor V. Rev. Protopresbyter Stavrophor Nicholas Ceko noted that this year marks a very important anniversary in the life of our diocese: 15 years since the installation of His Grace Bishop Maxim as diocesan bishop. In gratitude, for his many years of service, the diocesan clergy presented him with a pectoral cross and panagia which was given to the young children present at the banquet to gift it to him.

Special guest and keynote speaker Presvytera Dr. Jeannie Constantinou delivered the keynote address during the banquet on the theme of this year’s Diocesan Days Gathering: “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit, be with you all” (2 Corinthians 13:14).

She began with a hypothetical question: what if someone gave us three precious gems? If we knew what they were and knew these gems might change our life, what would we do with them? Would we use them or just put them in our pockets and forget about them? But let us consider, she continued, what we already possess, something far more valuable than those gems: the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the communion of the Holy Spirit. Those gems that we image are not real, they are merely created objects and we don’t have them. But what we have is something far more valuable and precious; not something created but the Creator. This, which the Church has given us, is more valuable than anything we could acquire on earth. And though we might know this

fact intellectually we certainly don't behave as if we do. All of the things we spend lifetimes achieving are fleeting, they are dust. But whatever things we do in the church and we receive in the church remain because those things are for eternal life. This apostolic blessing of the Apostle Paul from Second Corinthians, the theme of this year's Diocesan Days, we know from the Divine Liturgy. What we need to remember, however, is that this blessing is a wish and not a command. Or, in other words, we don't say, Grace be with you but May the grace of God be with you. We don't pray for our deceased Memory Eternal but May their memory be eternal. We're not commanded to have these gifts, God doesn't force them on us, rather we are invited to partake of them. Furthermore, this means that the priest offers these words, he gives this invitation, and it's up to us whether we will receive it and do something with it. God is the one who is always ready to give us these gifts but we're not always open to receive them. St. John Chrysostom once said that God would perform miracles but we don't let Him! When we receive the blessings in Church what do we do with them? Do we put them in our pockets like the gems? We're called to evaluate the treasures we've been given and use them.

The banquet concluded with a word from His Grace who thanked everyone for attending, for their love and support of this diocese. He thanked the clergy – and the children who presented him with his gift, "since my priests know that I would only take it from your hands," he added. "These fifteen years were the best of my life."

Filled with prayers that God grant our Bishop Maxim many, many more years in our Diocese of Western America the clergy, monastics, delegates and guests continued their fellowship before, one by one, they each left for their home parishes.















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