24/09/2021

His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros of America Archpastoral Exhortation to the Metropolis of New Jersey Clergy Laity Assembly



The Venetian – Garfield, New Jersey

Your Grace Bishop Apostolos of Medeia,
Father Christoforos Oikonomidis, Chancellor of the New Jersey Metropolis,
Father Dimitrios Antokas, President of the Metropolis of New Jersey Clergy Syndesmos,
Mr. Leon Andris, Vice President of the New Jersey Metropolis Council,
Mrs. Eleni Constantinides, New Jersey Metropolis Philoptochos President,
Reverend Fathers and Presvyteres,
Esteemed Archons of the Ecumenical Patriarchate,
Honored Members of Leadership 100,
Dear Sisters of the Metropolis Philoptochos,
Esteemed Delegates to the Clergy Laity Assembly,
Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I rejoice to be with you today at this Clergy Laity Assembly – both as your Archbishop and as Patriarchal Vicar of this Holy Metropolis of New Jersey. This is a

wonderful opportunity to learn and to share with one another the Good News of our Holy Archdiocese, and to then bring these glad tidings back to the local parishes, which are the lifeblood of our Church.

Our assembly today as Clergy and Laity is vital to our life together as Church. The theme of this Assembly:
“Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free,”
is only half of the story. Right before this, the Lord said:
Ἐὰν ὑμεῖς μείνητε ἐν τῷ λόγῳ τῷ ἐμῷ, ἀληθῶς μαθηταί μού ἐστε.
If you abide in My message, you will truly be My disciples.

Here then, my friends, is the key to our life together in our Parishes, our Metropolis, our Archdiocese, and the global Church.
As we abide in the Logos – the Message of the Word of God, we reveal that we are the true Disciples of Christ. Remember, “disciple” means student – one who is always learning. And what do we learn from the Lord, who is our greatest Teacher?

We learn how to truly love, self-sacrificially for those around us – friend or foe.
We learn how to truly forgive, without holding a grudge in our hearts or a bad opinion in our minds.
We learn how to truly give, with a generosity that is not based in reciprocity, but in the pure joy of enriching others.
We learn how to truly show mercy, by extending our compassion to each and every suffering person, without judgment, and without condescension.

My beloved friends of this precious Metropolis:
These lessons, learned every day and with every effort to abide in them, these are the source of our freedom. Freedom is not license to do what we want, whenever we want to. Nor is it some personal space that we insist on keeping only for ourselves. Real freedom is found in truth – not in facts and figures, or even the most compelling science.

The truth that our Lord teaches us, is that we are all created with a purpose, and with a place in the universe. We relate to everything, and everything relates to us. When we begin to understand this reality, it changes the way we see our lives — especially the life of the Church.

If we can acknowledge this reality, just as God is present in every aspect and in detail of all creation – ὁ πανταχοῦ παρών, καὶ τὰ πάντα πληρῶν, as we pray in the invocation, “Heavenly King” – then we, too, are in relation to everything and everyone. This truth sets us free from our egocentric desires and personal

agendas, so that we can enter into a synergy with one another, and indeed, with every living thing.

Thus, it is freedom that we are practicing today in this Clergy Laity Assembly. The freedom to work together, to compromise where we must, and to celebrate the gifts of each sister and brother in Christ.

Such freedom releases us from concentrating on the μικροπρέπειες that might antagonize us. Remember what the Lord said when the Legalists of his day criticized Him for healing on the Sabbath. The story bears repeating:
Jesus was giving instruction in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath, and a woman was there, who for eighteen years had been gripped by a sickness that bent and twisted her body so much, she could not even raise her head.
When Jesus saw her, He called out to her, and spoke directly to her: “My Lady, you are released from your infirmity!” Then He laid His hands on her and instantly her body straightened and her health returned.

But the leader of the synagogue reacted, infuriated that Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, and said to the crowd, “They are six days on which it is proper to work. So, come on these days and be healed; but not on the Sabbath!”

Then the Lord replied to him, “Hypocrite! Do you not all – on the Sabbath! – loose your cattle or donkey, and lead them from the trough to water? So ought not this woman here – who is a daughter of Abraham! – and whom Satan has bound – behold! – for eighteen years! –should she not be loosed from this bondage on the day of the Sabbath?” After Jesus said this, all His adversaries felt ashamed; but the vast number of the people were exhilarated by the glorious things He did.

My beloved Christians:
Here is our lesson for this day. Let us practice what we preach! Let us not be caught in legalism for the sake of legalism. Let us apply ourselves to our sacred work, abiding always in the Message of our Teacher – our Lord Jesus Christ. Then our work shall be fruitful and its effects lasting.

There is so much Good News coming forth from our Church.
The upcoming Visit of our Ecumenical Patriarch!
The Lighting of the Saint Nicholas National Shrine!
The continuing progress at our beloved Hellenic College Holy Cross, which our President, George Cantonis, already shared with you.
And you heard much other Good News from the reports of earlier today.
We are very blessed as a Church, and we give the glory to God for these abundant

blessings.

I thank all of you – and each of your parishes – for abiding in the Message of our Savior. And I pray that you, and your families and loved ones, always be blessed with health of body and soul, and every spiritual gift.
May the Good Lord bless us all!
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