11/10/2021

Homily of Archbishop Elpidophoros of America
The Third Sunday of Saint Luke



My Beloved Christians,

I rejoice to be with you today for many reasons. First, I always enjoy worshipping with the many Parishes of our Sacred Archdiocese, and to be able to see and hear from you personally. But during the coming week, our National Clergy Retreat will also take place here in sunny Naples, where we will have to the pleasure to be gathered in your wonderful city for fraternal fellowship and spiritual reflection.

Just as your clergy supply support and spiritual nourishment for your souls, they also benefit from the support they find in one another, and in the refreshment that this annual retreat brings. As their spiritual father, I rejoice to see them in this setting, to see and hear from them, and to offer what I can to help them in their ministries and in their lives.

We all know the certain exhaustion that comes from life and its struggles.

Sometimes, we experience great personal loss and suffering. It is no different for the clergy, just as it was not different for the Widow of Nain that we read about in today's Gospel. This nameless woman had lost her husband, and now she had lost her only son.

The Lord, as Scripture says, was moved with great compassion when He saw this widow coming out from the city gate with her son on the funeral bier. Perhaps, in His knowledge of His own purpose, He thought of His own Mother, the Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary.

There would come a day in his own life when His Mother, bereft of her protector, Joseph, would come forth from the Gate of another city – Jerusalem – in order to bury her only Son.

The Lord recognized the deep grief in the Widow of Nain. He felt her suffering – as He feels all of our suffering – and He performed an extraordinary miracle: He raised her son from the dead.

Now, we should not think that every horrible loss is met by God with such remarkable miracles. This is because, as Jesus said, His "Kingdom is not of this world."[*] But where there is not always the result for a miracle on the outside, there is always the possibility for a miracle on the inside.

Even the deepest hardship or loss can be restored in the interior person – in the human heart. Within this secret temple of our physical selves, healing of the heart, mending of the mind and even resurrection of the soul are all possible.

The difference between us and the Widow of Nain is not the degree of our pain, but that her miracle occurred in the external world of everyday life and death. Our miracles occur in the inner person, where change occurs for eternity, and not just the length of our earthly lifetime.

The Widow of Nain was doing her duty in burying her only child. She came forth from the City to do so, because the Jewish custom was not to bury the dead within city walls.

In like manner, the Lord was crucified and buried outside of Jerusalem, in accordance with Jewish law and custom. But we are called to go forth with purpose and understanding beyond the mere conventions of society. We are called to love and not hate; to lend and expect nothing in return; to give generously without thought to our own benefit. We are called to exit the conventions of this world for the reality of the next. As Saint Paul says:

Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered outside the gate. Let us go forth therefore unto Him outside the encampment, bearing his reproach. For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come. [†]

Indeed, my beloved Christians, we seek a City yet to come – the Holy City of God, the New Jerusalem – where we shall be God's People, and God will be us. "Death shall be no more, and there shall be no more mourning, no more crying, no more pain, and God shall wipe away every tear from our eyes." [‡]

May we be granted to know this in our hearts this day, and every day.

Amen.

[*] John 18:36.

[†] Hebrews 13:12-14.

[‡] Revelation 21:4.

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