20/10/2021

Great Vespers with Rassophoria, Stavrophoria, and Tonsure



His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros of America
Great Vespers with Rassophoria, Stavrophoria, and Tonsure

My Beloved Community of Holy Cross and Hellenic College:

Tonight, on the eve of the Feast of the Deposition of the Holy Relics of Saint Gerasimos the New in Cephalonia, we gather in our evening prayer to bestow upon members of our School the signs of service to the Holy Church. We will bestow the Rasson and Cross upon those whose studies are leading to the Holy Priesthood. We will also initiate through Tonsure those who will take the first step by becoming Readers of the Church – charging them with sounding the message of both the Old and New Testaments within these sacred precincts.

And we perform these liturgical symbols in a very special atmosphere – one in which we remember the cherished person of the late Bishop Gerasimos of Abydos.

I have great reverence for Bishop Gerasimos. For the course of his spiritual life manifested both his serious and unwavering commitment to the spiritual path, and at the same time his obedience and dedication to the Church. He began as a monk of Mega Spelaion, and then of Mount Athos, and was eager in his pursuit of the Life in Christ.

And he served, not only his own vocation to holiness of life, but he answered the call of his Church to serve as a priest, a Chancellor, an educator and a professor here at this School. Ultimately, he served as a Bishop of the Church, both here in Boston and finally in Pittsburgh under Archbishop Iakovos, with whom he rests until the Resurrection just outside this Chapel.

We have heard much, and will hear more about the good Bishop Gerasimos. But I raise his virtuous person to everyone here this evening, as an example of the marriage between individual salvation and service in the Church.

For those of you who remember Bishop Gerasimos, he never gave up his intense inner life – a life dedicated to God with all his heart, soul, strength and mind. But there was no selfishness in him. When the Church called him to serve in these many capacities, he bowed his head and gave of himself without reservation. His was not a self-centered life of the spirit. Neither through retreat to the monastic life, nor in academia. Both pursuits are of themselves good and can lead to salvation. But only if they are not dominated by the ego. And Bishop Gerasimos subdued his ego to the yoke of Christ; for he was a man of service to the Church above all else.

Even in his later years, and most especially in his retirement, he made his abode here at the School, to mentor and guide generations of Clergy. His desire to serve never left him; it was part of his very being.

I raise this exemplar of our Faith, the Bishop whom we celebrate during these days, even as we praise his Patron, for a specific reason.

Every student who comes to this Holy Hill, does so inspired by their own understanding of spiritual life and of Holy Orthodoxy. Through your years at Hellenic College and Holy Cross, through your studies, you will develop your own opinions about that spiritual life and about the Orthodox Faith.

What I want you to understand is that occasions like this evening – the Tonsures, the Rassophoria and Stavrophoria – are all passages that lead to the same place, the place of service and ministry.

These are not accomplishments to serve your own needs, but the needs of the Church.

Therefore, I ask you to pay close attention to this saintly and humble Bishop, and mark this occasion in your mind – the eve and commencement of his Patronal Feast – as a moment when you advanced for the sake of others and not yourselves.

I commend you to this beloved Community of Holy Cross, and charge you to begin your service to the Church here – emulating the blessèd Bishop Gerasimos with humility, devotion and dedication.







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