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His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros of America Homily at the Liturgy of the Feast of Saint Nicholas the Wonderworker



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Homily at the Liturgy of the Feast of Saint Nicholas the Wonderworker And Installation of the Saint Nicholas National Shrine Parish Council

Dear Father Andreas,

Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

While I had wanted to have this Divine Liturgy in the Shrine itself, so as to continue our journey to the full opening of the Church – inaugurated by the blessing of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew just last month – it was necessary for us to allow for construction to proceed apace.

We are so very close to our dream: to the restoration and, indeed, resurrection of the Church of Saint Nicholas. It has been over twenty years in the making, and we are so very close now. Even so, we have lost beloved members, friends and family who yearned to see this day. Therefore, the charge that I give to all of you today –

the Parish Council of Saint Nicholas National Shrine – is all the more significant. For you carry on your shoulders the enormous task of rebuilding the parish that was devastated two decades ago. The bonds of the parish have survived, but we have lost some who were near and dear to our hearts. Nevertheless, we must be prepared to embrace those who will seek out the renewed Church and the mission of our National Shrine.

For this reason, I have assigned as your Προϊστάμενος and my Archepiscopal Vicar, my own Chancellor, the Reverend Protopresbyter Andreas Vithoulkas. And thus, no one will ever be able to say that I have denied you anything!

In addition to his leadership, which will commence full time in just a few months, we have our Friends of Saint Nicholas. They are the ones who took up the cause to complete the Shrine in earnest – always guided, of course, by the ever vigilant and diligent Father Alexander Karloutsos.

And I have appointed four of their number to be with you on the Parish Council, including the Vice Chair, our beloved friend and steadfast partner, Michael Psaros, Chrysa Demos (who is the Secretary of the Friends), Richard Browne, the pro bono COO of Construction – without whom we could not have achieved the progress we have made during COVID-19 – and our good friend George Mihaltses, who has served as an exemplary President of the Parish Council.

I have also appointed my sister in Christ, Anthoula Katsimatides, for she has borne witness to the incalculable loss of 9/11 – which, as you know, included her beloved brother, John. She has been a transformational figure of immeasurable service to the entire memory of 9/11, and I want to welcome her beloved mother, Calliope, as well. Together, you have held steadfast a faithful and loving memory, which we all admire and deeply appreciate.

We also welcome to the Council the invaluable Lou Katsos, who seems to be in every corner of the positive activities for the Omogeneia, and the distinguished counsellor, Demetrios Orfanoudis.

At this point, I would also like to recognize – with special affection and honor – the presence of Presvytera Romas, whose beloved late husband, Father John, served the Parish through the tragedy of 9/11. We are very happy to have you here among us today, my dear Presvytera, for you carry with you the living memory of Father John’s love and pastoral care for the Parish.

And speaking of the Parish, we also have on the Council noble members from the precious Church at 155 Cedar Street. We are so grateful that Elizabeth Brody-

Dimonekas, Joan Dimonekas, Regina Katopodis, Olga Pavlakos and Peter Zaharatos will serve on the Parish Council. They will be integral in helping us – and, particularly, Father Andreas – to rebuild the community, especially from those who were scattered, or who felt scattered after 9/11.

We also will have on the Council the Ex-Officio Members, who are the leaders from these National Organizations that have assisted the rebuilding of Saint Nicholas in substantive ways:

The Archdiocesan Presbyters Council President: Father Mark Leondis;

The National Commander of the Order of Saint Andrew: Archon Anthony Limberakis;

Our National Philoptochos President: Arlene Siavelis Kehl;

The Supreme President of AHEPA: Jimmy Kokotas;

And the Chairman of Leadership 100: our dear friend, Argyris Vassiliou.

I am also asking Demetrios Papacostas, a shining light of our community, to serve in a special advisory capacity to the Parish Council, to bolster your resourcefulness. Of course, you also have the remaining members of The Friends of Saint Nicholas, who will be ready to assist you.

I cannot give enough importance to the work of weaving together again all of the precious threads of the little Church on 155 Cedar Street. This primarily means the community members, as well as all those who will want to become members in the future. There has also been a proposal to offer a “virtual membership” in the Shrine, as a way of gleaning support from any and all from around the world who are interested.

The new Saint Nicholas will have a national and even international profile that no other Church in the Archdiocese has ever dreamed of. We must be innovative, creative, and consciously and carefully move forward, so that we may bring the mission of Saint Nicholas to the public, commensurate with the dignity of our traditions and the piety of our faith.

Also, we are going to take the second-floor space, which had originally been determined for the Bereavement Center – and which is in fact too small for such a ministry – and turn it into a museum space for the remnants and relics of the original church.

The Bereavement Center will be assigned elsewhere at the World Trade Center,

where we hope to place offices for the Shrine. But the inclusion of those precious items that were recovered after 9/11 – a few icons, some books and candles, and other sacred remains – need and certainly merit a space for their memory.

My beloved members of the Parish Council of Saint Nicholas:

You see that we have extensive but exciting work ahead of us. You all have my confidence and utmost faith that you will labor together in harmony for the good of the Parish and the renown of the Shrine. This is truly a new chapter, not only for the Parish, but for the Archdiocese as well.

It seems fitting to me that it is in the year of the centennial celebration of our Sacred Archdiocese that the ministry of the reborn Saint Nicholas will commence. In fact, on the Fourth of July, in the midst of the centenary Clergy-Laity Congress, we plan to consecrate the Shrine, too.

Therefore, we must all the more implore the holy intercessions of Saint Nicholas, so that we will be successful conquerors of every obstacle and challenge.

May God grant unto all of you, your families and your loved ones, good health and strength, so that you may serve our National Shrine and the Parish of the Holy Wonderworker of Myra with much honor, pride and prudence, and with the wisdom that surpasses all understanding. Amen.

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