08/12/2021

His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros of America Greetings to District Clergy Syndesmos



My beloved Fathers and Brothers in Christ,

I bring to you the blessing and greeting of our spiritual father, His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, fresh from my own visit at the Venerable Center of our Faith at the Phanar. I rejoiced to see His All-Holiness in excellent health – fully recovered and fresh from his own recent visit to Greece.

The celebrations of the Thronal Feast of the Mother Church were exemplary – as they always are – and full of the promise for deeper and kinder relations between the New and Elder Romes. I was also encouraged by the visit of Pope Francis to Greece, and the reception accorded to him both by the government – since he is technically a Head of State – and the Church.

Ecumenical dialogue is not an easy thing, because of the often heavy baggage of past sins – sins of both omission and commission. But just like my recent reception at the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops in Washington, DC – accompanied by brother hierarchs from the Assembly of Bishops – the ecumenical endeavor is a must for all of us who call ourselves “Christians.” For we must

practice love above all else.

Especially in this season of the Christmas fast, which takes us to the Nativity in the flesh of our Lord Jesus Christ, we behold in the commemorations of the Church various masterpieces of love. Whether it is the three Saints we just commemorated: Barbara the Great Martyr, Savas the Great Monastic, or Nicholas the Great Wonderworker – or the ancestors of the Lord, whose names will ring out in the coming days and weeks – each and every one of them is a work of artful love, crafted by God Himself – in the flesh they share with our Master and which they also share with us. And there is no more perfect icon of this love than the Holy Mother of God Herself. She was the Holiest of Vessels to bring the Creator to His creation. And we behold in her humility to give birth in the Cave, the magnanimity of her soul.

Therefore, in greeting all of you today – who are true brothers in spirit – I urge you to remember this humble love, as we draw near to the holy Twelve Days in which we celebrate the feasts of Christmas, New Year and Holy Theophany.

Our faithful are both tired and wearied by the pandemic. And now with the "omicron" variant, they are as anxious as ever. Therefore, we need to be patient and thoughtful with them, and work with them to allay their fears. We do not wish to lose the quality of our celebrations this year, and we pray that by God's mercy, we shall be able to hold our services in their full panoply of the glorious liturgy. Please pay attention to your environments and take special care for your flocks.

We have traveled far in this year of 2021. We have overcome many obstacles, and through the grace of God, we were able to bring His All-Holiness to America for his Apostolic Visit. We held a special Θυρανοίξια service at the Saint Nicholas National Shrine with our Patriarch that inaugurated its liturgical functioning. And with the appointment of our Chancellor, Father Andreas, as the new Προϊστάμενος of the Shrine, as well as the new Parish Council that I installed yesterday, the operational life of the Shrine is starting anew. This will doubtlessly raise the consciousness about Orthodoxy in the region; so you should prepare yourselves from now, in order to be ready to give an answer to those who will inquire and seek out our Church, because they heard of the Saint Nicholas National Shrine.

Next year, as you all know, we will celebrate the centennial of our Sacred Archdiocese. The Clergy-Laity Congress will be here in New York, and we will host our brothers and sisters from around the country. I expect each and every one of you to contribute to the success of the Congress and the celebrations of our centennial as an Eparchy of the Holy Great Church of Christ.

Our history is important … our story is important. And we must tell it to the younger generations. We want them to be proud and grateful. Proud for what the Greek Orthodox Church has brought America: the Apostolic Faith of Christ of the Mother Church of Constantinople, and the ingenuity of the Greek People. And grateful for what America has given to our Church: freedom and opportunity.

My beloved brothers in Christ:

With these few words I close my remarks, and I wish you and your families happy and healthy celebrations of the wonderful feasts that are coming our way. They are gifts from God and offerings of the Greatest Gift the world has ever known – our Lord, and God, and Savior, Jesus Christ.

May His grace be with us all, always now and forever. Amen.

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