16/12/2021

His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros of America Homily at the Vespers of the Feast of Saint Eleftherios the Hieromartyr



Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Exactly one year ago, I was so very happy to preside at the Great Vespers of your Heavenly Patron, the Great Hieromartyr Eleftherios. How much has changed over these last twelve months!

Last year, we were in the midst of the pandemic, and just on the cusp of the vaccine program that promised relief. But today, we see with the variability of the virus, that we may have to learn to live with it for much longer than we anticipated.

Thus, our gathering here tonight of prayer and praise is all the more important. Because we need the mighty intercessions of God's Saint to give us the fortitude and strength to carry on.

This historic parish of Saint Eleftherios in Chelsea is an example of such fortitude and strength. Through the devastating loss of the original Church building and through all the changes in the neighborhood, your community has persevered

through thick and thin, keeping the traditions of our Greek Orthodox faith alive. All of you are to be commended for constancy and your fidelity.

Tonight, we include in our commemorations for the feast, the departed servant of God, Steven Hlampeas. He served this community as Parish Council President, and was taken from us due to the pandemic. Such a loss manifests how much we have suffered as the Church.

I was very moved when I learned that you, his fellow parishioners, wanted to pay a special tribute to him this evening, and that a new artophorion is being given in his memory.

The artophorion is such a special symbol, because they are always small representations of churches. Within them, as their very name suggests, is the reserved and consecrated Ἄρτος – the Body of the Lord, that is specially prepared at the Divine Liturgy of Holy Thursday.

Thus, the artophorion is in a very real way, a microcosm of your parish. And how appropriate it is , indeed, that you honor Steve with such a symbol of this wonderful Saint Eleftherios Church – the church he loved so much and to which he was so devoted.

It is my prayer that as we remember Steve with this artophorion, we also remember that we are the living artophorion – the container of God in this world. As the Apostle Paul asks:

Οὐκ οἴδατε ὅτι ναὸς Θεοῦ ἐστε καὶ τὸ Πνεῦμα τοῦ Θεοῦ οἰκεῖ ἐν ὑμῖν;

Do you not know that you are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?[*]

My beloved Christians,

This parish, this community of Saint Eleftherios, is the temple of the Living God, because God lives in you.

Each of you is called to be an artophorion – the container of God that extends to others – and to manifest the presence of God in this world.

All of us are collectively the Body of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who is the Bread of Life, the Sustainer and the Sustenance of the entire universe.

Therefore, let us knit our hearts together tonight and every night – through our

prayers and through our remembrances.

Thus, we shall honor the Great Hieromartyr Eleftherios.

We shall honor those who came before us.

And above all, we shall ascribe the honor, the glory, and the praise to our God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Who is worshipped in Trinity, now and ever, and unto the ages of ages. Amen.

A Merry Christmas to you all,

And a Happy and Healthy New Year of the grace of our Lord.

[*] I Corinthians 3:16.

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