20/12/2021

His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros of America Homily at the “Challenge Liturgy”



Beloved Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Of all the events that I am called to during these busy weeks before the blessèd Feast of Christmas, I believe that today’s Liturgy – and the community that has come together for it – warms my heart the most of all.

For over thirty years, this wonderful Archangel Michael Community has made the inclusion and participation of our most precious Church members a special occasion. And it is one that I am honored, as your Archbishop, to preside over today.

If Christmas means anything, it means that we are all children of God, because God willed to become a child for our sake and for our salvation. We give gifts on Christmas, not in order to earn the love of our family and friends, but to express it. And as I look around your magnificent sanctuary today, I behold in the faces of everyone present, the greatest gifts of all: children of God and precious members of the Church. I give thanks to God because of all of you, and I thank you for your commitment to this program of inclusion and welcome.

God is present in every atom of His Creation, even when the creatures are unaware of His Divine Presence. God is always willing and ready to manifest Himself in our experience, but we have to be willing and ready as well. That is what this worship of the Church is – our preparation to receive God here, so that we can receive Him in every aspect of our lives.

And that is why this Liturgy is so important and so meaningful to me personally. We were all created in the image and likeness of God, but some of us have special, and even more challenges, than others. But it is how the community comes together to affirm the value and participation of every member, that we come to the knowledge of our own value before God.

Here at Archangel Michael, you take a leading role in this ministry of fellowship and inclusion. You follow your Heavenly Patron, who is the Captain of the Celestial Hosts. And this leadership is so much more than it appears. For, as our Lord Jesus said:

Μακάριόν ἐστι μᾶλλον διδόναι ἢ λαμβάνειν.

It is more blessèd to give, than to receive. [1]

Those who have come for this Divine Liturgy today are truly blessed; for they give so much more than they take.

They give us the opportunity to serve others, as the Lord served us.

They give us the chance to be better persons than we might be, if left to our own devices.

They give us the opportunity to slow down and see what is really meaningful in this fast-paced world.

And they give us the gift of their presence – a presence that is grateful for what we can offer.

My beloved friends,

There is no better way to prepare to receive the Lord of Heaven on earth, than this Divine Service you offer here today.

May the Child of Bethlehem reveal Himself in your lives and in your hearts throughout these days of celebration and joy.

And may this Christmas and the coming New Year be filled with health, happiness and the infinite blessings of God for you, your families and all of your loved ones.

Merry Christmas!

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