18/02/2022

Archbishop Elpidophoros of America, Eulogy for Father George Poulos



Dear Presvytera Christine,

Beloved Sons of Father George: Peter, Dean, Michael, John, and Paul – and your dear families and children,

Your Grace,

Reverend Fathers and Beloved Flock of this Archangels Church,

We come together on this day, in order to honor and indeed to celebrate a legendary priest, father, grandfather, friend, and visionary of our Church. To say it simply: Father George Poulos lived a life, longer than the life – thus far – of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America.

One hundred years! But I shall not say old. Father George was one hundred years new, as it says in the Prophecy of Isaiah:

Ἔσται γὰρ ὁ νέος ἑκατὸν ἐτῶν…

For the young man shall be one hundred years old…[*]

There can be no doubt in the mind of anyone who knew Father George Poulos — even those who only knew him peripherally — that his dynamism, his energy, and his sheer commitment to the Church that he served his whole life long, was as effervescent and youthful as any Child of God could ever be.

His long life, matched by his beloved and incomparable Presvytera Christine, is both a cause of rejoicing, and a cause of sadness today, as we mourn his passing. We have had Father George with us so long, that for many here and around the country, life without him seems impossible, indeed, illogical. But there is also joy and gladness, for his life was so packed with meaning and accomplishment, that it will take us more decades to share the stories of such a life well-lived, than the ten decades in which our beloved Father George lived it.

Joy and mourning. Joy-making mourning. A coda that Father George has gifted to us in his repose, for we are approaching the season of Χαρμολύπη,[†] the Fast of the Holy Forty Days that takes us to Holy Week and Pascha. A final statement of faith from a faith-filled preacher and teacher. That in our mourning his loss, we rejoice in the promise of the Resurrection. That in missing his presence, we remember all the ways he showed us how to be better people, better Christians, better Orthodox.

I have to say, it is a great challenge to even attempt to recount the achievements of Father George. To eulogize means to speak a blessing. But his whole life was a blessing, a life of over one hundred years. Sixty-one years of active pastoral ministry – with fifty-six of them right here at Archangels. Whole lives have been spent under the gentle shadow of his wing; as he shepherded the flock entrusted to his care with wisdom, foresight, and unparalleled responsibility.

Even following his retirement, he was always engaged and engaging. He was such a mentoring presence to the younger clergy, and always willing to give of himself. With his passing, the bright sun of his beloved Pomfret is setting, but it will never be extinguished. The legacy of the Holy Cross that first emerged, right here in Connecticut, lives on in Brookline. Father George remains part of the generation of pioneer priests – the first graduates of our Theological School. And I am very pleased that in 2017, Holy Cross bestowed upon him the degree of Doctor of Divinity, honoris causa, for his exemplary life of ministry, and his contributions in liturgy, history, hagiography, and his memorable biographies of Archbishop Iakovos and Archbishop Athenagoras Cavadas. These are just a few of the bright stars in

the galaxy of accomplishments of Father George.

As I reflect on him as a priest, I marvel at his incredible service on both the local and the national level. What he built here in Stamford speaks for itself: a magnificent Temple and Community, secured by his providential planning. But on a national level, Ionian Village alone stands out as the triumph of a lifetime. And he always served under his Archbishops with the fidelity and allegiance that comes from humility and from strength.

His beloved family, with whom we humbly gather today to pray for their strength and their peace in this time of grieving, knows another side of Father George. A true pater familias, Father George found a way to be all things to all people. [‡]

In this Centennial Year of the Greek Orthodox Church of America, there is something profoundly moving in the departure of Father George for the eternal glory of life everlasting. I feel as if he is saying to us, in the language of Saint Paul:

“I have fought the good fight; I have finished the race; I have kept the faith.” [§]

But he would add something more … something like this:

‘Yes, I fought the good fight, and raced the course of life, and kept the faith for one hundred years. Now, you must carry on for the next one hundred.’

Truly, my friends…

Father George’s life and ministry is a perfect mirror of the first century of our Church in America. I ask each and every one of you to make an aspect of his legacy your personal model for this next century. He gave us so many gifts – too many to count. Each of us can find in his extraordinary life something to emulate, a gift that we can imitate and pass on in our own legacies. All of us are better Christians, better people, better human beings because of Father George. We can repay his years of dedication and devotion by paying it forward, by living lives of service and ministry.

May his family and all of you be comforted through these days of grieving. May you discover anew the happy and fulfilling memories of his loving presence in your lives.

And may the Lord our God — Who is the Resurrection and the Life — grant unto our brother and co-celebrant, George, the Protopresbyter, eternal rest among the Saints, a joyful dwelling in the mansions of our Heavenly Father, and the peace that passes all understanding, in the tabernacle of the Kingdom of Heaven.

May his memory be eternal.

Αἰωνία ἡ μνήμη αὐτοῦ.

[*] Isaiah 65:20.

[†] St. John of the Ladder, The Ladder of Divine Ascent, Step 7.

[‡] Cf. I Corinthians 9:22.

[§] II Timothy 4:7.

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