21/02/2022

His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros Clergy Synaxis and Dinner – 45th Annual Folk Dance and Choral Festival



Beloved Brother, Your Eminence Metropolitan Gerasimos,

Your Graces,

Dear Fathers,

I am delighted to be with you again at the FDF, but my experience today visiting monasteries has brought into focus something I would like to share with you – my brothers in the Priesthood of Melchizedek.

In our Archdiocese, in this Metropolis and every Metropolis, in the local parishes and in every parish, there is a tension – sometimes falsely portrayed – between the spiritual life and the secular life. Between this age and the age to come. Between the present moment and eternity.

I say that there is a tension between them, because there is a good tension that creates energy and, if I might say, spiritual propulsion. The so-called tension that is false is when someone opposes the one to the other. The Lord did not take us out

of this world, but He gave us the spiritual gifts to transform it and not be of it. *

So here on my first full day in Arizona, I am at two monasteries and tomorrow, the Folk Dance Festival. And they are not diametrically opposed in any way. They are two aspects of the fullness of God's gifts.

It is when one is set against the other, so as to create an imbalance in the Body of Christ (much like the Pharisee with the Publican last Sunday), then sickness arises in the Church. Tension is good, as long as it is held in balance. Having returned from Saint Anthony's Monastery, I am reminded of this tale of the Great Saint, which you may remember:

A hunter, wandering through the desert, came upon Abba Anthony while he was making jokes with the brethren; and he was shocked. Wishing to teach the hunter that it is sometimes necessary to relax with the brethren, the old man said to him: "Put an arrow in your bow and bend it." The hunter did so. "Bend it a little more," said Anthony. The hunter obeyed. "And still more," Anthony told him. "But if I draw the string too tight," said the hunter, "the bow will snap." And the old man said to him: "It is the same in the work of God. If, in the case of the brethren, we draw the string too tight, they will snap under the strain. So it is necessary sometimes to relax with them." When the hunter heard this, he was filled with compunction, and profiting much from what the Elder had said, he went his way. And the brethren, greatly strengthened, departed to their own place. †

Here, the Saint of God, teaches a most valuable lesson. The bow can only launch the arrow effectively, if the tension is right, if it is in balance. Too tight, and the bow itself will break. Too loose, and it will not fly at all. So it must be with us, who are the clergy. If we impose upon them too much severity, we will break their spirits, rather than refresh them.

That is why I commend all of you, beginning with Metropolitan Gerasimos and all who make the Folk Dance Festival possible. Because you bring just the right tension to the bowstring, with just the right elements of culture and ministry. And in so doing, you can propel the arrow of their faith even farther, as Saint Paul says:

… δὲ ἔμπροσθεν ἐπεκτεινόμενος κατὰ σκοπὸν διώκω ἐπὶ τὸ βραβεῖον τῆς ἄνω κλήσεως τοῦ Θεοῦ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ.

… reaching ever-forward to that final goal which lies before me, I press on toward the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. ‡

Those of you who know the works of Saint Gregory of Nyssa know this spiritual

theme of epekstasis – the ever-reaching, pressing higher and farther of the Created toward the Creator. The gulf between is infinite, and therefore the journey is infinite. And this is the journey that we launch our children on in life, who are “like arrows in the hand of a mighty man,” as the Psalmist says. §

We aim them in righteousness, but we launch them through a positive and wholesome tension, gifting them with both the solemnities of our tradition, and the embrace of our civilizational values.

My thanks to all of you for making this possible at the FDF, and my congratulations and blessings to you all.

* Cf. John 17:15-16.

† The Alphabetical Collection.

‡ Philippians 3:14.

§ Psalm 126:5 (LXX).

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