21/02/2022

His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros Homily for the Sunday of the Prodigal Son 45th Annual Folk Dance and Choral Festival



Beloved Brother, Metropolitan Gerasimos,

Your Grace Bishop Spyridon and Brother Bishops,

Beloved Children in the Lord,

What a joy for me to be back at the Annual Folk Dance and Choral Festival – the Forty-fifth presentation of this wonderful celebration of faith and culture!

This is the Sunday of the Prodigal Son, the very same Sunday that we observed together two years ago in Anaheim, California. It is a day that is leading us to prepare for the Fast of the Forty Days, and brings us to Holy Pascha. But in some ways, it contains the entire history of salvation – from the Creation to the Regeneration of all things.

The parable begins with trust – the father entrusting his children with all that he has. We don't hear about what the older brother does with his portion, but we hear every detail of the Prodigal, how he wastes every gift from his father. This parable

is for every human being who has ever lived.

But this is just not a story of loss and waste. It is a story of God's redeeming love for the universe, and for every single human person. We witness the fall of the Prodigal into the worst of circumstances, and we can often see the result of such failures in our own world. Pollution, war, excess, inequity, prejudice, persecution, and the like. These are the price for not being responsible stewards of God's universe.

But in the end, God doesn't wait for us to make it all the way home. He comes to us. The father runs to his son and embraces him. He restores him to his original dignity and station. And then he throws him a party. Much like the one we have been enjoying here at FDF.

Our music and dancing – they would fit in very well with the great feast the father holds for his prodigal son. Even when the older brother complains, because he wants a party of his own. Perhaps the lesson here at FDF in this Parable is that it's not about competition; it's about celebration. It's not about winning; it's about the welcome that we can offer to one another, whatever our circumstances have been.

The desire to be first no matter what the cost, to advance oneself at the expense of others, is neither healthy nor useful. It stems from selfishness and from a weak ego, from low self-esteem. If you can only feel good about yourself by making others feel bad, then you have lost already.

I want to share with all of you a secret. If you do not look for honor, but rather seek to serve … honor will find you. If you do not seek glory and rewards, but are humble before God, glory and reward will be yours.

We have in our midst today living proof of this truth: His Grace Bishop Spyridon of Amastris.

We are awarding His Grace today with the Metropolitan Anthony (of blessed memory) Humanitarian Award. And why? Did Bishop Spyridon ask for this? Did he seek this honor for himself?

Of course not! Neither did he seek, after decades of exemplary service as one of the most exceptional priests of our Archdiocese to become a Bishop, after the repose of his beloved Presvytera Chrisanthe.

You can read for yourselves the tremendous accomplishments that Bishop Spyridon has achieved in the Church for over six decades. I invite you to marvel at his

energy, his commitment, his fidelity, and his service.

But what I want you to remember the most is his humility, his lack of self-promotion, and his generosity of spirit.

He has practiced these virtues his entire life, and because of them, our Ecumenical Patriarchate, and our Holy Eparchial Synod, recognized in him a worthy candidate to become a Bishop of the Church.

Unlike the Prodigal Son, Bishop Spyridon has never wasted his gifts. But like the Prodigal, he has remained a humble servant of the Heavenly Father.

Therefore, as we honor him today, I urge all of you to take his example to heart. Learn from his service, his dedication, and his focus. Thus we shall one day find ourselves in the halls of our Father’s home, in joy and gladness, and partaking of the Mystery of the Age to come. Amen.

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