19/04/2022

Homily by His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros of America At the First Bridegroom Service



Beloved sisters and brothers in Christ,

Behold! The Bridegroom comes to us… In the middle of the night, ἐν τῷ μέσῳ τῆς νυκτός. In the middles of our lives.[*]

The Bridegroom appears before us – we, who are His Bride, the Holy Church, called to be “without stain, wrinkle, or any such thing … holy and blameless.” [†] We are called to adorn the garment of our souls in order to receive this Heavenly Bridegroom, who has come to claim us for Himself and for all eternity. But something holds us back. Something keeps us from giving ourselves to Him. Something blinds us from the truth.

You see, my friends, we are not approached by a handsome, attractive and powerful personage. As the Prophet said:

He has no form nor comeliness; and when we see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him. He was despised and rejected of men; a Man of Sorrows, and

acquainted with grief: and we hid our faces from Him; He was despised, and we esteemed Him not.[‡]

This is how the Bridegroom comes to us. And this is how we see him in His Holy Icon tonight, and for the next two nights. Pilate shouted: Ἴδε ὁ ἄνθρωπος. “Look at the Man!” [§] But we glorify Him and cry out: “Behold the Bridegroom!”

Instead of embroidered robes, the purple of mockery.

Instead of laurel and blossoms, a crown of thorns.

Instead of royal mace, a reed of ridicule.

Instead of hands with golden rings, iron chains to bind Him.

Our Bridegroom is unrecognizable! Except to the eyes of the heart. Except to the eyes that can look upon the shadows of appearance and see the reality of His burning love for each and every one of us.

His humiliation in this Icon is truly the glory of His love. Because it manifests that there was no depth to which He would not descend, nor height that He would fail to climb in order to come find each and every one of us.

He traversed the greatest distance ever known – that of the Uncreated to the Created, from Heaven to Earth.

As the Apostle Paul sings in Philippians:

He emptied Himself, taking the form of a slave, born in human likeness. Found in human configuration, He humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross.[**]

This is our Bridegroom, the One Who is seeking us tonight and every night. The One who winds His way and finds His way into our hearts, where he will accept us as truly His Beloved.

My friends,

Do not ever think that you are unworthy of His love. Though your sins may be red as scarlet, He will wash your soul, and you will be whiter than snow – whiter than the wool of an innocent lamb. [††]

Our Bridegroom will spare nothing in pursuit of your love. He will never accept how we spurn His affection because of our sins, out of our ignorance, and from our guilt

and shame.

He has come this Holy Week to take us into His Bridal Chamber, the sacred Θάλαμος where we can learn what it truly means to be a complete and whole human being.

My beloved Christians, this Night, this Holy Week, let us receive the Bridegroom into our innermost soul. Let us welcome His love, just as a happy and joyful bride welcomes the open arms of her bridegroom.

Let us make of our hearts a temple in which we shall wed Him in the Mystery of the Marriage Supper of the Lamb of God, which is the Holy Eucharist.

Behold, the Bridegroom comes in the middle of this Night!

Let us go forth in gladness and honor to meet Him!

Amen.

[*] Cf. Dante's Inferno, Canto One, line 1: "Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita…."

[†] Ephesians 5:27.

[‡] Isaiah 53:2,3.

[§] John 19:5.

[**] Philippians 2:7,8.

[††] Cf. Isaiah 1:18.

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