20/04/2022

Homily of Archbishop Elpidophoros at the Third Bridegroom Service



Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

I am so very pleased to be with all of you – the devout faithful of Kimisis Tis Theotokou Church here in Brooklyn. I was with you at this very same service last year to hear the immortal Hymn of Kassiani, which was so beautifully chanted by our beloved psaltes.

This hymn is such a resounding reminder of what it means to participate in the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ. It reminds us that every Christian is, in some way, called to be Myrrh-bearer, as the hymn says of the sinful Woman:

μυροφόρου ἀναλαβοῦσα τάξιν…

to take up the rank (or office) of a Myrrh-bearer.

And please take notice, my dear faithful, that the Woman came to Christ just as she was. She had yet to forgive herself, much less gone through any system of penitence in the Jewish custom.

And yet, she was drawn to our Lord – sensing His compassion, His mercy, His love and, as the Hymn says, His Divinity.

So it is for us, too. When we give ourselves over to a life of faith and faithfulness to the Church, we begin to sense that the Lord is a real presence in our hearts. We feel His love and His compassion. And we recognize in Him the goodness of God.

If we are also drawn to him, we must not hesitate. We must not judge ourselves unworthy of His love, but let Him be the judge of our hearts and intentions.

The Bridegroom of the Church, Whose Holy Countenance we behold in the Icon of the Nymphios, does not come in judgment. In fact, He allows the judgment of the unjust Pilate to come upon His Sacred Head. And how it comes down! With a Crown of Thorns!

If you are in this Church tonight expecting God to critique your life and the decisions you have made, I want you to think again. Reconsider your position because in truth, it is a selfish one. To focus on your failings is to concentrate your spiritual energies on your own ego. Does the Bridegroom look like a judge to you?

Of course not! He is the One Who comes to set us free from our failings, our sins, and the guilt and shame that come with them.

But like the sinful Woman, who loved much, it is on the basis of our love that our forgiveness will be measured. And not because God is unwilling to give it; but because we do not know how to receive it. This is why the Woman brought the myrrh. To offer something to the One Who gives us everything.

And she did not let anyone get in her way either. Imagine what was being muttered in that room, as everyone knew her reputation. But she did not let that stop her. She persisted, even if others resisted.

And when the thoughts of the hypocrites were read by the Lord, He asked them all in front of her:

“Do you see this woman here? I entered your home, and you offered Me no water for My feet. But this woman? She washed My feet with her tears, and dried them with the hairs of her head. You gave Me no kiss. But this woman? From the moment she entered, she has not ceased to caress My feet with kisses. You provided Me no oil to anoint My face. But this woman? She anointed My feet with myrrh. This is why I say to you, her many sins are forgiven, because she loved much. But if you are forgiven only a little, you love only a little.” 1

Therefore, my beloved Christians,

If we feel we just fine as we are, and we do not need the infinite mercy of God, then we will offer small things to God – because our love is small.

But if our love is great, and we offer to Christ what is most precious – like the Myrrh poured forth upon Him by the Woman in advance of His Burial, we shall be forgiven everything.

Therefore, let us become Myrrh-bearers. Let us bring to Christ what is most precious. What is most pure. And what is most dear.

And thus, we shall participate with Him in the fullness of His Burial, as prized attendants, and rejoice in the morning with utter amazement, when we find the Empty Tomb. Amen.

Καλὴ Ἀνάσταση!

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