09/05/2022

Archbishop Elpidophoros of America At the Consecration and the Divine Liturgy Greek Orthodox Church of the Assumption

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Reverend Fathers,

Beloved brothers and sisters in the Risen Christ,

Χριστὸς Ἀνέστη! [in response: Ἀληθῶς Ἀνέστη!]

Christ is Risen! [in response: Truly He is Risen!]

Χριστὸς Ἀνέστη! [in response: Ἀληθῶς Ἀνέστη!]

Today is truly a glorious day for this wonderful community that has come so far over the decades. Together, we pray to the Lord our God that He might visit this church and consecrate it unto Himself for all eternity.

And it seems so appropriate that we do so in this Paschal season, during the days when we celebrate the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ most brilliantly. For what is the Κοίμησις τῆς Θεοτόκου if not a little Resurrection, following a season of fasting? In receiving His Holy Mother's body into the heavens – by granting her the Resurrection of the flesh before the Final Day – the Lord manifests the fulfillment of His promise of eternal life, for each and every one of us.

We, however, must continue to wait for the appearance of our everlasting restoration and salvation. But the granting of the Resurrection of the Body to our Panagia demonstrates the veracity of the declaration that you can look up to – right now – in the dome of this magnificent edifice:

Ἐγώ εἰμι ἡ ἀνάστασις καὶ ἡ ζωή. Ὁ πιστεύων εἰς ἐμέ, κἂν ἀποθάνῃ, ζήσεται· καὶ πᾶς ὁ ζῶν καὶ πιστεύων εἰς ἐμὲ οὐ μὴ ἀποθάνῃ εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα. Πιστεύεις τοῦτο;

I AM the resurrection and the life! Those who believe in Me, even if they die, they shall live. And everyone who lives in Me and believes in Me shall never, ever die. Do you believe this?”[*]

The Lord Jesus said these very words to Martha, the sister of Lazarus, just minutes before He raised her brother from the dead. And He ended this triumphant affirmation with a question: Do you believe this?

Indeed, my beloved Christians, on this day of the consecration of your church, when we bury the bones of Martyrs inside the Holy Table – much as our Lord was buried in the grave of the Rich Man in the Garden – the Lord asks each one of us:

Do you believe this?

Do you believe that death is not the end of life?

Do you believe that death is but the portal through which we pass over to eternal life in God?

Do you believe in the power of God to raise the dead?

Do you believe that life is worth living, not only for the experience of this world, but as a preparation for the next?

If so, then this Consecration today must be much more for you than the anointing of the Holy Table, the Sacred Vessels, the Icons and all the other liturgical actions that we perform.

It must be much more than a once in a lifetime rite of passage for this grand and splendid church of the Lord.

It must become the consecration of your families, your goods, your careers and your very lives to God!

It must be the consecration of your hearts to the Faith in the Risen One, Who is, as your dome proclaims: the resurrection and the life!

It must be the consecration of your eternal souls to the truth uttered by our Lord: everyone who lives in Me and believes in Me shall never die!

This is the consecration within the Holy Ritual of Consecration that we celebrate today.

When the Holy King Solomon – a direct ancestor of our Lord Jesus Christ – finally completed the building of the Temple in Jerusalem, he stood before this magnificent structure on Temple Mount, and uttered these words:

Εἰ ἀληθῶς κατοικήσει θεὸς μετὰ ἀνθρώπων ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς; Εἰ ὁ οὐρανὸς καὶ ὁ οὐρανὸς τοῦ οὐρανοῦ οὐκ ἀρκέσουσίν σοι καὶ τίς ὁ οἶκος οὗτος ὃν ᾠκοδόμησα.

But will God in very deed dwell with men on the earth? Behold, heaven, and the heaven of heavens, cannot contain You; how much less this house which I have built! [†]

Brothers and Sisters,

Here we stand today and ask ourselves the very same question. But unlike the wisest of the wise, the Prophet-King Solomon, we already know the answer!

God chose to dwell in the womb of the Virgin.

God chose to live among humankind.

God even chose to ascend the Cross in the flesh, that He might redeem us from our sins.

And God willed to rise from the dead, to grant us eternal life.

And now, in this House of Prayer, God will forever be present with you, as you are present with Him.

Every aspect, every corner, every icon and liturgical flourish in this Holy House reminds you of God’s presence. It is the hallmark of our Orthodox Faith.

Therefore, my beloved Christians,

As this Temple is consecrated around us this morning, let our inner lives be consecrated as well – “Holiness unto the Lord!” as it says in Scripture. [‡]

Let us fill our hearts and minds with:

holy thoughts,
holy desires,
holy motives,
holy aims,
holy pleasures, and

pursue holy objectives.

Let us dedicate:

all our mental powers,
our physical strength,
our wealth,
our abilities, and
our possessions.

Let them all be used, like this church we consecrate today, for God, and for His glory, from this day forward, and unto the ages of ages. Amen!

Χριστὸς Ἀνέστη! [in response: Ἀληθῶς Ἀνέστη!]

[*] John 11: 25-26.

[†] II Chronicles 6:18.

[‡] Zechariah 14:20.

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