02/06/2022

Homily of Archbishop Elpidophoros at the Great Vespers of the Ascension



Beloved brothers and sisters in Christ,

Tonight, I rejoice in celebrating with you once again the glorious feast of our Lord's Ascension, which is also the patronal feast of this wonderful parish.

The Ascension of our Lord completes the great pendulum swing of the Word – the Logos of God. He descended through His Incarnation in the womb of the Virgin Mary. And tonight, we celebrate His ascent back into the Heavenly Kingdom of His Father – from which, as God, He was never truly separated. As it says in the Scripture, He is our "great high priest, Who is passed into the heavens." [*]

And by His Ascension, the Lord has "seated us in heavenly places."[†] Because His human nature is present in the Celestial Realm, every human being is already potentially there with Him. "For Christ did not enter into the Temple made with hands, which is a foreshadowing of the true reality; but into Heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us."[‡]

He presents His Divine Humanity, which he shares with us through the Theotokos, to the Heavenly Father. And we see an image of this in the Feast of the Presentation on the 2nd of February. Inside the re-built Temple of Solomon, the

elderly Symeon took the Christ Child in his arms Forty Days after His Holy Nativity. And in the present feast, Forty Days after His Resurrection, the Son of God is received in the embrace of the Heavenly Father in the Temple Not-Made-with-Hands.

Just as our churches are reflections of celestial glory, so does our Liturgy remind us that we are somehow already enshrined within the Ἀχειροποίητο, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. And thus, this is a blessing for which we must raise our awareness.

Think about it! When you are struggling with the challenges of everyday life – whether it is business, education, or family worries. In those moments, and in every moment, you are already in the Heavenly Kingdom with Christ – ἱεροκρυφίως, "in a hidden sacred manner."[§]

And so, in those moments of frustration and anxiety, of uncertainty and even danger, we can access our high position and calling in Christ through faith. We can literally rise above the causes and conditions of this world, not by avoiding them, but by transforming them. The power for this transformation is already available to us in Christ. For His Humanity is our humanity. His Flesh is our flesh. We are wed to Him through the Panagia in the Mystical Marriage Supper of the Lamb, which is the Divine Liturgy.

And if we cannot be in Church twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, and fifty-two weeks a year (even the Monastics of our Church cannot do this), we can infuse our consciousness with the practice of the presence of God in every place and at every time – ἐν παντὶ καιρῷ, καὶ πάσῃ ὥρᾳ – as the prayer of the Hours says.

At each and every moment of our lives, the potential for divinity rests within us, because Christ has ascended in Glory. He has "entered into His rest," as the Scripture says,[**] but He is ever-vigilant and ever-active on our behalf.

All we have to do is to access this potential. And this is a life-long quest. For to experience the fullness of God, we need to live as He lived – lovingly, mercifully, gracefully and compassionately. When we live in such a way, even the most mundane aspects of our lives will be transformed. And we will know what it is to live – ὡς ἐν οὐρανῷ καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς – on earth as it is in Heaven.

Because the Lord Jesus is already in Heaven for us! Heaven was always His home, but it is our haven to which we aspire.

My beloved Christians, may this Ascension always remind us to “resolve in our hearts to ascend.” [††]

And may the Lord ever bless this parish with every good and perfect gift from above, through the prayers of the Theotokos and all the Saints. Amen.

[*] Hebrews 4:14.

[†] Ephesians 2:6.

[‡] Hebrews 9:24.

[§] Anavathmoi of the Fourth Tone.

[**] Hebrews 4:10.

[††] John of the Ladder, and Psalm 83:6 (LXX).

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