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Remarks of Archbishop Elpidophoros of America At the Doxology for the Greek Independence Parade In the Presence of the Presidential Guard



Brothers and Sisters in the Lord,

Today is the Sunday of the Holy Fathers, the Lord's Day that bridges the Feasts of Ascension and Pentecost.

But today, we have the added joy of celebrating with the presence of Noble Brothers – the Presidential Guard of Greece. They have traveled across the ocean to join us in our march up Fifth Avenue, and to mark our pride and glory in the Independence of Greece. Many of you will be among the thousands who will line the famous Avenue to rejoice in this wonderful occasion. It is long overdue, and I would like to thank all those who have labored to make this event possible – most especially the President of the Hellenic Republic, Her Excellency Katerina Sakellaropoulou, for her consent to send the Guard.

The Evzones, though, are much more than just an elite guard, whose historic and distinctive military uniform so closely identifies them with Greece in the minds of the world at large.

They are in fact a symbol of the profound depth and breadth of the Greek spirit. Even the name by which they are most widely known – Evzones – is a word that in the Greek language stretches back to the Iliad of Homer. It literally means "well girt," in the sense that their vesture is such that they are prepared to meet any enemy in defense of their homeland.

By their august presence alone, they remind us of the virtues – spiritual virtues, if you will – that we should all aspire to imitate and attain.

They stand at attention – as we must also do if we are to preserve our freedom in Christ, which comes through the Incarnation, and the blessings of liberty, which are the benefit of living in our democratic republics. There is a reason that throughout the Divine Liturgy we hear the deacons intone: "Πρόσχωμεν! Let us be attentive!"

It is to invite our deliberate consideration and concentration on the Message of the moment – whether in word or deeds. Therefore, as the Evzones stand at attention, they inspire us to do so in our hearts and minds as well.

They also stand in obedience to their commander, whomever it may be. We, too, have a "Captain of [our] salvation" – Ἀρχηγὸν τῆς σωτηρίας [ἡμῶν] – the Lord Jesus Christ. He is our Heavenly Commander, and His commandments are for us to stand upright, to stand well – as we intone in the Divine Liturgy: Στῶμεν καλῶς, στῶμεν μετὰ φόβου. And above all, to make our stand in the virtues of love, compassion, mercy and forgiveness, so that His Holy life may be exemplified for all the world to see.

As we prepare to chant our Doxology, we witness these heroic Evzones standing before us and give thanks for the independence of Greece, which is a freedom that has gifted us and the world with a tremendous civilizational legacy of culture, philosophy, language, art and so much more. These gifts were baptized by our Christian forebears to become the glory of Byzantium – that is, a glory that lives on in the spirit and ministry of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople. And these Evzones here today, remind us to be as much the pillars of our faith, as they are the immoveable pillars standing in the House of our God, as the Book of Revelation promises:

I will make the victor a pillar in the temple of My God, fixed and immovable, one upon which I will inscribe the Name of My God, and My own new Name …. 1

Finally, these noble Sons of Hellas stand in silence. Their perfect silence is an echo of eternity, for as Saint Isaac the Syrian says: "Silence is the mystery of the age to come." 2 Their silence and stillness is a reminder of the tradition of hesychasm, the prayer of conscious intention within the heart that leads to unceasing prayer in every aspect of ones' life.

So you see, my beloved Christians, the Evzones are much more than they might appear to be. They represent what is best and brightest in our traditions, and they bring their dignity to our Doxology and to our parade.

Indeed, we are grateful to these Noble Brothers on this Sunday of the Holy Fathers. And being inspired by their example, let us give thanks to God in our Doxology today for our freedom in Christ, and the liberty we enjoy in the lands of our birth and in the land of our lives.

Let us march with joy, pride and deep gratitude for the sacrifices of others, which have made our life possible – standing firm and faithful, like the mighty Evzones, to

the cause of freedom for every person.

Ζήτω ἡ Ἑλλάς! Ζήτω τὸ Ἑλληνικὸ Ἔθνος!

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