26/07/2022

Homily By His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros of America At the Great Vespers of Saint Paraskevi



My beloved Christians,

Tonight, we sang with unspeakable joy to the Great Virgin-Martyr:

Παρασκευή, νύμφη τοῦ Παντάνακτος, σκεῦος τοῦ Πνεύματος.

Paraskevi, bride of the King of All, and vessel of the Spirit.*

As I look around and behold you – the faithful of this wonderful parish in Greenlawn, together with your sisters and brothers from around Long Island – I sense the spirit of elation and gladness that would accompany any wedding.

Our celebration here tonight, at this Service of Great Vespers, reminds us how Saint Paraskevi gave herself totally and unsparingly to our Lord Jesus Christ. She became His wisdom-bride through her vow of undying fidelity. She became a holy

and sweet offering through her martyrdom. And she became the image of the Church – His Body – through the sacrifice of her own body.

She exchanged earth for heaven. She gave up all the enticements that this world can offer for the poverty of God, which leads to riches unimagined.

But beyond the celebration that this Great Vespers commences, we also call her σκεῦος τοῦ Πνεύματος – vessel of the Spirit – which invokes her very name: Παρασκευή.

Indeed, she is a vessel of the Spirit – one among countless others – who contains within herself the fullness of God's presence. And although she is a creature, she holds the Creator, as Saint Paul once wrote:

We have this treasure in earthen vessels, to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us. †

Inasmuch as she was a vessel of this earth, she was a precious jewel as well – one of the purest gold fired in the furnace, and the very likeness of the purity of Heaven. She showed to all of us that we, too, have the capacity to become vessels of the Spirit. For creation in its entirety declares the glory of God, and the firmament of space itself proclaims the works of His hands. ‡

Just look up into the dome of your beautiful Church. The six days of creation are masterfully displayed in an iconographic marvel. The sun and the moon, the stars and the light, the waters and the earth, the birds of the air, the denizens of the deep oceans and animals of all kinds.

Above all, though, we behold the Creator of the Universe, our Lord Jesus Christ – the Pantokrator – infusing us and all things with life, with the Holy Spirit itself.

Now, compare this magnificent tableaux of iconography with the images you have seen in the past days that have come from the James Webb Space Telescope. I hope that each and every one of you – as a family – have taken time to enjoy these incredible pictures of galaxies billions of light years away from our own planet. These icons (if I may call them such in the most basic meaning of the word) present innumerable vessels of the potential of the Holy Spirit – so many, in fact, that only the Mind of God can comprehend their meaning and purpose.

But as Saint Paul says so eloquently:

Since the creation of the cosmos, God's invisible attributes – His eternity, His power and His divine nature – are clearly perceptible as objects of reason from things that

were made. §

Like your Saint, the Holy Paraskevi, every created thing can be a vessel of the Spirit, and it can reflect the glory of God.

Therefore, my beloved brothers and sisters, we must ask ourselves: “What kind of vessel am I? How do I reflect the glory with which God has infused every grain of sand and shining star?”

This is Paraskevi’s message for us on her holy feast. She wants us to look up into the dome of this Church and find our own sense of belonging in the world that God created. She wants us to embrace the Spirit that God is breathing in our direction every moment of every day.

She wants to look up into the night sky and consider the heavens, the works of His Divine Hands, the moon and the stars which He established. **

Saint Paraskevi was not born in a time that had the technical power to look into deep space as we do today. But she saw the same wonder, the same mighty and awesome beauty of God, that we behold through our fantastic telescopes today.

And she chose to be a vessel of the Life-giving and Life-creating Spirit. Even at the cost of her own life.

May we be inspired by her example, then, so that we, too, might become vessels filled with the Spirit, and serve as a blessing to everyone in our lives, as she is to all of us.

Through her holy intercessions. Amen.

* Στιχηρὰ τῆς Ἁγίας, Ἦχος πλ. δ’.
† II Corinthians 4:7.
‡ Cf. Psalm 18:1 (LXX).
§ Romans 1:20.
** Cf. Psalm 8:3.

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