26/07/2022

Archiepiscopal Encyclical on the Day of Mourning for Hagia Sophia– July 24, 2022



Unto the Most Reverend and Right Reverend Hierarchs, Pious Priests and Deacons, the Monks and Nuns, Presidents and Members of Parish Councils, Honorable Archons of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, Members of Leadership 100, the Day and Afternoon Schools, Philoptochos Societies, the Youth, Greek Orthodox Organizations, and the entirety of the Christ-named Plenitude of the Holy Archdiocese of America:

“We did not know whether we were on heaven or on earth.”

(Ambassadors from Kyivan Rus’ upon visiting Hagia Sophia in 987)

My Beloved Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

There is a reason why the Embassy from Prince Volodymyr of Kyiv were

transported within their souls those many centuries ago, and described their feelings by echoing the words of Saint Paul narrating one of his own experiences: “whether in the body or out of the body, I know not; God knows.” (II Corinthians 12:3)

The worship and adoration of God within the Great Church of Holy Wisdom, our Ἁγία Σοφία, were a moment of transfiguration equal to that which was upon the Holy Mountain of Tabor, where the Apostles said: “Lord, it is good for us to be here” (Matthew 17:4). But those Ambassadors did not linger within that Sacred Precinct; instead, they returned to their Prince. And the rest of this history unfolded as we all know. The Slavic People received Baptism and transformed their own civilization by the Holy Orthodox Faith.

Today, our precious Hagia Sophia, which was seized without cause, still inspires the souls of those who seek the unalloyed Faith of the Orthodox. While we mourn the captivity of the Great Church, we hold out hope for a return to at least the status quo ante, when the museum context could still reveal the glories of Byzantium that are now hidden by an alien purpose.

We also mourn over the great destruction wrought in Ukraine by an unjust and truly unnecessary war by Russia. For these two nations are all children of the Great Church, and their Baptism was inspired by the beauty of Hagia Sophia. Let us pray that Her comeliness, reflected in the ongoing spiritual ministry of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, will arouse the same love for Christ and His Holy Church that peacefully brought about the conversion of their ancestors.

Let us pray that Her beauty will be not covered forever, but instead revealed for all the world to see. And perhaps, the wonder of those Ambassadors of Prince Volodymyr may once again overwhelm those Children of Rus’ who turn away from the truth of God, that they may yet behold the light of Heaven that can restore their land and their souls.

With paternal blessings and love in Christ,

† ELPIDOPHOROS

Archbishop of America

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