08/08/2022

Homily By His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros of America At the Divine Liturgy



My beloved in the Lord,

I am so pleased to be with you today, especially because my travels to our Ecumenical Patriarchate and to Pontus, in order to celebrate the feast of the Dormition at Panagia Soumela with His All-Holiness, will keep me from you this year. Nevertheless, I will carry you and the whole Archdiocese in my heart, praying at this holy ground for the blessings and grace of the Virgin Mother to be with us all.

Like the Angel Gabriel, who addressed the Panagia as “Κεχαριτωμένη,” we recognize the Theotokos as a vessel overflowing with the Grace of God. Just as her womb was filled with the God-Man Jesus Christ – the Incarnate Word of God, Whom she gave birth to miraculously – she also is filled with an abundance of grace to such an excess, that she freely gives of all her spiritual gifts to the People of God.

This Community of Kimisis Tis Theotokou in Island Park is blessed indeed to have the Panagia as your Protectress and your Advocate before the Throne of God.

Your devotion and dedication to her is a sign of your spiritual vitality, and I know that your priest, Fr. George, is proud to lead you in the journey of your lives.

For if you consider the Panagia, and the course of her life, we behold a model for our own. She was born into a pious household, where Joachim and Anna were loving and grateful parents to her. She was dedicated to the worship of the Lord from a very young age – three years old when she entered the Temple. And there she grew and was fed by a hand of an Angel, as the Psalm foretold.* Think of the superior nourishment that you receive, not the Bread of the Angels but the Bread of Life, the Holy Body and Precious Blood of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. And though she dwelt in the Temple of Jerusalem, we are not confined to a single sacred space. The Church encompasses the entire world.

And when it was time for her to fulfill her destiny to bring forth the Incarnate God into this world, she accepted the humble station of her guardian Joseph. She gave birth in the lowliest of circumstances, but she made of the earthen cave in Bethlehem a Celestial Palace fit for the King of Kings. We, too, are called to make our hearts into little caves where Christ can be born again through us. It makes no difference if we are great or small, young or old, rich or poor. We are all called to be Θεοφόροι – those who bear and manifest God in their thoughts, words and deeds.

She followed her Son, and she had her questions, but she never lost faith in him. She stood by the Cross when His Disciples fled away.

Finally, she received the Good News of the Resurrection, the Descent of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, and lived a peace-filled life with the Apostles, until it was the time for her Falling Asleep. And then she made this final dedication, as we chant in the Paraklesis:

Ἀπόστολοι ἐκ περάτων, συναθροισθέντες ἐνθάδε,

Γεθσημανῆ τῷ χωρίῳ, κηδεύσατέ μου τὸ σῶμα,

καὶ σύ, Υἱὲ καὶ Θεέ μου, παράλαβέ μου τὸ πνεῦμα.

O You Apostles from far off, being gathered together

in the village of Gethsemane, lay my body in burial,

And You, my Son, and my God, receive now my spirit from me.

A perfected ending to a perfected life. I do not say perfect from the beginning, because the Theotokos grew in grace throughout her life, and came to the final conclusion of life's journey that we all must. And what was her reward? Nothing less than the Resurrection.

So shall it be for all of us who follow the example of our Panagia. Let us stick with the Lord throughout our lives, even when we have questions. Let us stay with Him at the Cross of self-sacrifice and love, and bear witness to His Resurrection, as did the Theotokos. Let us fervently engage with the Church, the Body of Christ, throughout our lives. So that when we come to our deaths, we may pass as did the Virgin Mother of God. Being laid to rest by the witnesses of the Faith, and offering our spirit to her Son and our God.

Amen. Καλό Δεκαπενταύγουστο!

* Cf. Psalm 77:25 (LXX).

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