14/09/2022

REMARKS by His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros of America At the Opening of the Exhibition Mount Athos: The Ark of Orthodoxy Maliotis Cultural Center – Hellenic College & Holy Cross



Your Eminence and Graces,

Dear President Cantonis,Deans of Hellenic College and Holy Cross,

Faculty and Students,

Honorable Symeon Tegos, Consul General of Greece in Boston,

Esteemed Members of the Mount Athos Foundation,

Honorable Mayor of Thessaloniki, Konstantinos Zervos, Chairman and Esteemed Members of the Mount Athos Center joining us via livestream, as well as Director Anastasios Ntouros,

Beloved Father Loukas of Xenophontos Monastery,

Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

What a joy and an honor it is to be with all of you today, at this auspicious opening of the Exhibition: Ἅγιον Ὄρος: ἡ Κιβωτὸς τῆς Ὀρθοδοξίας – Mount Athos: The Ark of Orthodoxy.

As I consider what is happening in New York, at the Saint Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church and National Shrine, where our dear Father Loukas, who is with us here today, is installing a complete iconographic program – the first ever such total installation of an Athonite aesthetic in America – I am filled with much emotion for this exhibition.

Mount Athos – το Περιβόλι της Παναγίας – is a unique manifestation of the Church

in the world. For over one thousand years, the fathers of the Holy Mountain have labored in the deepest ways to connect with God, as well as with one another. And although they have left the world, they are bound with it as its most fervent intercessors.

This magnificent peninsula, crowned by the summit of the mountain, embodies the living and fragrant tradition of the Holy Spirit that first blossomed in the deserts of Skete, Palestine and Cappadocia. The Holy Mountain's unbroken history of more than a millennium is a sign from God that the essential teachings and doctrines of our Church are as unchanging as the life of the holy brethren who inhabit this Garden of the Panagia.

So often, in our everyday world, we pour out praise and adulation for those explorers of our physical world, especially for astronauts who venture to outer space. But we must not forget those who explore the spiritual world, the inner space of the human heart and soul. As such, I would name the fathers of the Holy Mountain to be psychonauts, or navigators of the soul.

The laboratories of their experience are based in the great Twenty ruling Monasteries, some Imperial, but all Patriarchal and Stavropegial, falling under the spiritual jurisdiction and protection of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. The ecumenicity of the Holy Mountain is accentuated by the presence of Serbian, Bulgarian and Russian monasteries among these twenty, as well as with the great Romanian Skete of the Prodromos, a special and historical relationship with Ukraine, and the presence of monastics on the Mountain from virtually the world over.

Mount Athos is truly the Ark of Orthodoxy, holding within itself all the elements of the spiritual life that can be lived by every human being in the world, who is willing to delve the depths of their own souls.

This exhibition, which features all twenty Monasteries, is a wonderful introduction to their spiritual, aesthetic, cultural and human values. Not everyone can go to Mount Athos, because it possesses the ἄβατον – the seal of its monastic discipline. And even less will ever have the opportunity. But the wisdom and experience of the Holy Mountain can be brought into the world by such exhibitions as this, and by inviting these monastic traditions into our hearts and minds by reading the great spiritual texts that are preserved there, and by cultivating the arts of Athos in the new world. This is precisely what Father Loukas is doing at Ground Zero in the adornment of the Saint Nicholas National Shrine.

I would like to express my profound thanks to The Mount Athos Foundation of

America (MAFA) and to the Mount Athos Center of Thessaloniki, Αγιορειτική Εστία, for making this exhibition possible. You have enriched our precious School by your generosity, and I hope and pray that many – and not only Orthodox Christians – will come to the Maliotis Cultural Center to drink deeply from this experience, which holds up the mirror of our hearts and minds to the brilliant lamp that is the Holy Mountain, the Garden of our Panagia.

Thank you.

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