14/09/2022

Remarks by Archbishop Elpidophoros At the Great Vespers of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross Rassophoria and Stavrophoria (HCHC)

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Beloved brethren hierarchs and reverend clergy,

Dear faculty and staff, students and families,

Esteemed friends and supporters of this blessed community of Hellenic College and Holy Cross,

It gives me great joy to be here among you once again, at the beginning of your academic year, and the beginning of our ecclesiastical year. These annual rites of passage here at our School are part of the essence of this holy place, where the continuity of our faith is expressed around the feast of the Exaltation of the Holy, Precious and Life-giving Cross.

We are also just a few days removed from the anniversary of 9/11, which was truly a crucifixion moment for America and, indeed, the world. While so much has changed since that fateful day, our Greek Orthodox Archdiocese bears the responsibility of bringing the faith, hope, light and love of Jesus Christ to Ground Zero with the rebuilt and resurrected Saint Nicholas National Shrine.

Even as I speak to you right now, Father Loukas of Xenophontos is installing the magnificent iconographic program within the Church – a program that was designed by our very own Bishop Joachim of Amissos at my request. And by God's grace, it will be the most widely viewed and visited Orthodox Church in this hemisphere.

The fact that we have the presence and the talent of Mount Athos infusing this National Shrine with the brilliance and beauty of our Orthodox faith, is highlighted here on this campus, with the opening of Ἅγιον Ὄρος: ἡ Κιβωτὸς τῆς Ὀρθοδοξίας – a celebration of the history and significance of the Holy Mountain for all of us.

I make a point to draw your attention to this wellspring of tradition that is being incarnated here in the United States because you – the students, faculty and administration of our precious School – are charged with nourishing and cherishing the fulness of this tradition.

This evening, we commence our celebrations of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, and we acknowledge that we are "the People and the Inheritance" of which we chant in the festal apolytikion. For you, the future leaders of our communities – clergy or lay – understanding your role as the "People and the Inheritance" is vital, and of the utmost necessity for the health and wellbeing of the Church.

Tonight, many of you receive the Cross and the Rasson – the outward signs of what I hope is your inward disposition. For individually and together, they symbolize what it means to be the saved "People" and the blessed "Inheritance" of which you sing – not only today, but every day!

Simply put, but never to be forgotten: we are saved by the Cross – by the sacrifice of ineffable love and compassion with which our Lord Jesus Christ willingly ascended an instrument of pain and death, and transformed it into an "Invincible Trophy and Weapon of Peace."

When we wear this symbol, we testify that our path is the Way of the Cross. That we are following His example of love, compassion, forgiveness and mercy by carrying our own cross of self-denial. And our blessèd Inheritance is symbolized by the Rasson; for it is a garment of service, ministry and mission. As inheritors of the Apostolic and Patristic faith, it is incumbent upon us all to teach and preach, preserve and propagate, the Faith that "established the Universe."*

And this School is the practice field – a training ground – upon which all of you hone your skills and deepen your convictions, so that your service to the Church is both God-pleasing and expedient for the Body of Christ.

If you are receiving these symbols for the very first time, or if you are returning to this holy hill to continue your formation in Christ, remember this: it is not the adornments of the body that are transformative; rather, it is those of the soul.

And speaking of transformation, this evening has a very special element – one that is rarely seen at this service. Because we are honoring someone who exemplifies what it means to live as the People who carry the

Cross in their heart, and who ensure the Inheritance of the Church passes on to subsequent generations. I speak, of course, of our gracious sister in Christ, Helen Carlos.

Helen, please come forward; for I am honored to award you the highest commendation of our Sacred Archdiocese: the Medal of Saint Paul.

Helen Carlos has been a hero for this School. Her contributions – both financially and spiritually – together with her devoted husband, Ron Hilliard, have literally been lifesaving for our precious School. She has served with excellence as a board member, both financially, and as chair of the fund-raising committee, leading to successful outcomes for Hellenic College and Holy Cross at many levels.

Perhaps, though, her greatest achievement on behalf of our Seminarians is her establishment and support of the Saint Helen's Pilgrimage. This trip, which is offered to all senior seminarians, takes them to the Phanar – the Sacred Center of our Faith. They also travel to the Holy Land, to Thessaloniki and, finally, to Mount Athos. In addition to the spiritual aspects of the pilgrimage, there is also an intensive Greek language component and an exposure to Hellenic history and culture, which is only possible from such personal contact.

The Saint Helen's Pilgrimage is foundational and transformational for our seminarians, providing them a profound context in which to engage their post-graduate work and preparation for ordination.

Helen, you are truly worthy of this medal. For like Saint Paul, you are spreading the Good News of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ by all your efforts – known and unknown. It is only appropriate, then, that you receive this recognition on the Feastday of our School, the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, which you epitomize in every aspect of your life.

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