15/09/2022

Address By His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros of America At the Hellenic College & Holy Cross Convocation



Dear President Cantonis,

Your Eminence and Your Grace,

Honorable Symeon Tegos, Consul General of Greece in Boston,

Deans of Hellenic College and Holy Cross,

Reverend Clergy,

Beloved Students, Faculty, Staff and Administration,

Today, we gather in convocation – which means that we are “called together” – or, perhaps, even better, “sharing a vocation.” This would certainly be most true of this Hall at this moment, because here at Hellenic College and Holy Cross, we do share a common vocation – that of service to the Church.

Whether through training to become clergy, or fostering academic pursuits, or preparing for lay leadership roles in the Church – exemplified best by your President and our beloved friend, George Cantonis – each of you is called to bring a measure of service to the Church. This, of course, does not mean that such service is not personally fulfilling. We certainly hope that it is. But the larger point is that every aspect of your experience here on the “Holy Hill” should find its consummation in service to the Church.

Thus, the theme of our Convocation comes to light:

“So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another.”

This verse is part of a much larger exhortation in the Twelfth Chapter of the Epistle to the Romans. In Greek, the resonance of the words is quite profound:

οὕτως οἱ πολλοὶ ἓν σῶμά ἐσμεν ἐν Χριστῷ, ὁ δὲ καθ᾽ εἷς ἀλλήλων μέλη.*

For the Apostle is comparing us – the members of the Body of Christ – to the limbs of a physical body. As he says in the verse immediately prior: “all the limbs do not have the same function.”† This acknowledgement of the differences between us is good and healthy. We, who are members of the Ekklesia – the assembly of the summoned – are all called; but we are not called to the same responsibilities. For in the verses that follow our theme, we read:

And our diverse spiritual gifts are owing to the grace that is bestowed on us, whether it is prophecy – in proportion to faith, or administration – by our service, or teaching – by our instruction, or encouragement – by our acts of consoling, or sharing – by our sincerity, or leadership – by the effort we make, or mercy – by our cheerfulness.‡

So, there is a concrete recognition of the diversity of gifts exercised in the Church. Or, to put it another way, there is a place at the table for everyone who is willing to serve.

However, there is another aspect to being the Body of Christ. Yes, there are our differences, but Saint Paul says that we are: ὁ δὲ καθ᾽ εἷς ἀλλήλων μέλη – individually members of one another.

Take a look around you at your fellows ‘convoked’ in this Hall. Do you feel that you are just as much connected to them, as you are to yourself?

This is perhaps the most profound message of this Convocation today. It is easy to see the differences between us. One wears a robe, another a cross, another a coat and tie, another a crown. Understanding the various roles in the Church is only scratching the surface. To perceive the underlying unity we share, and I would go so far as to say, “identity,” this is the challenge.

For we truly are members of one another. This is where the mystery of the Church is found. You see a brother or sister in pain, or struggling, or in difficulties; but somehow you do not see them as yourself. Compare this to stubbing your toe, or slamming a door on your finger. The pain and suffering in that digit is your pain, your suffering. You, quite literally, know it in your very bones. Because they are your limbs, interwoven with every other limb by nerves and tissue and blood.

A woven texture, that is the nature of the Body of Christ. Not an organization, but an organism. We so admire χρυσοκεντήματα, the lovely, embroidered vestments that adorn the clergy. Modern technology has made such weavings available to all. But do we perceive the web of interconnectedness in which the Lord has established us?

I would compare our perception to a usual, visual assessment of our human form. We see only skin-deep. What lies underneath – the miraculous complex of bone, nerve, tissue, blood, vital organs and the rest – is invisible to the eye. Even if we had such vision as to see through the outer layer of our skin, how could we begin to process all that we would behold?

Well, my beloved brothers and sisters in Christ, this is our ‘shared vocation,’ which we instantiate in our Convocation today. To see in one another the identity, which Adam knew when he first beheld Eve as “bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh.”§ We are called together, convened today in this Convocation, to be reminded that we are the One Body of Christ. To identify with one another, to be members of one another, in a reciprocal relationship that gives more than it receives. As the Apostle says in another place:

If one member suffers, all the members empathize; and if one member is praised,

all the members rejoice.**

There is a beautiful unity and concord that comes from investing yourself in the benefit and success of one another. It allows you to enjoy your role in the Church, to find satisfaction in the ministry to which you have been called. And, especially, to find joy in the happiness of your fellow members of the Church.

My prayer is that in this new academic and ecclesiastical year, each of you will explore what it means to be “members of one another.”

That you will apply yourselves to best serve the community, and not look for ways to be served.††

That you will enhance your Orthodoxy, not merely with information about the Fathers and the Saints, but that you will enhance your Orthopraxy in imitation of the Fathers and the Saints.

That you will look to the Church and to this School not only as the place that serves your self-definition, but that you will go beneath the surface, and marvel at the interdependency and interconnectedness of every breath and heartbeat of your sisters and brothers in the faith.

Thus, you will be on the path of the compassion and empathy that gives every ministerial message and action the depth of genuineness. You will know the Holy Cross of our Lord as the “easy yoke” and the “light burden” that He promised.‡‡

My beloved community,

I call you “beloved” because you are much loved. Let us make of this year an experiment to weave the seamless robe of our Lord in our hearts,§§ and to feel the strength, warmth and precious covering of our kinship and connection in Christ. The robe of the Lord, His Body, is made up by all of us; for we are intricately a part of one another, destined to be perfected by His love and by His grace.

And may it always be so. Amen.

* Romans 12:5.
† Romans 12:4.
‡ Romans 12:6-8.

§ Genesis 2:23.
** I Corinthians 12:26.
†† Cf. Mark 10:45: “For the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve….”
‡‡ Matthew 11:30: “For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.”
§§ Cf. John 19:23: “however, the robe was seamless, woven from the top all the way through” (Greek: ἦν δὲ ὁ χιτὼν ἄρραφος, ἐκ τῶν ἄνωθεν ὑφαντὸς δι᾽ ὅλου).

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