

26/09/2022

Homily by His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros of America At the Service of Great Vespers Saint Demetrios Greek Orthodox Church



Your Eminence, and beloved Brother in Christ, Metropolitan Gerasimos,

Your Grace Bishop John,

Reverend Fathers of the Holy Metropolis of San Francisco,

Dear sisters and brothers in the Lord:

I am so very happy to be sharing this celebratory centenary weekend with your parish, and with the wider Orthodox Community of Seattle. I must stress that your parish and the Archdiocese are the same age! One hundred years young – each one!

I say, “young,” thinking of the wonderful phrase of the Prophet Isaiah:

Ἔσται γὰρ ὁ νέος ἑκατὸν ἐτῶν...

For the young man shall be one hundred years old...*

The same Prophet, who beheld the sacrificial offering of the Suffering Servant, also had a vision of God’s future blessings in His restoration through love in the world. In this verse, we see someone, who is one hundred years old, called, “young!”

And that is how I hope you will see yourselves as a church community. In the light of God’s redeeming love, you are “one hundred years young,” meaning, you are just at the beginning of your ministry and mission, as the Ekklesia of the Lord.

In saying this, we respectfully see the past – the contributions of your parents and grandparents, the physical and spiritual foremothers and forefathers of this parish – as the vital energy that has fueled you to this point. But what I would like to say to you is this: don’t rest on their laurels.

Νῦν ὁ καιρός! Now is the time for you to engage in the mission they set out for you

with even greater vigor and commitment.

We are celebrating Vespers this evening. This beautiful service is often seen as signaling the end of the day. But in fact, it is the beginning of the next day. For as the Scripture says:

And the evening and the morning were the first Day. †

We mark this beginning of a new day of God's providential love for the world with the most ancient and beautiful Hymn of Vespers, Φῶς ἱλαρόν. We chant:

O Joyful Light of the holy glory of the immortal Father, the heavenly, holy, blessed Jesus Christ. Now that we have reached the setting of the sun and behold the evening light, we sing to God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It is fitting, at all times, to praise you with cheerful voices, O Son of God, the Giver of life. Behold, the world sings your glory.

Vespers gives us such a magnificent image to contemplate. "Now that we have reached the setting of the sun and behold the evening light..."

You see, my beloved friends, the setting of the sun reveals the Evening Light – the unwaning Light that we proclaim at Pascha when we victoriously cry out:

Δεῦτε λάβετε φῶς, ἐκ τοῦ ἀνεσπέρου Φωτός....

This One Hundredth Anniversary of your wonderful parish is a moment of commencement – and certainly not one of conclusion!

The "evening light" that this Vespers acknowledges is "the True Light Who enlightens every person who comes into this world."‡ In this light, you shall proceed as a community of believers, a fellowship of love and compassion, for the next one hundred years. Your children's children will know of your works. For just as you have built upon the foundation that was set for you, they will build upon the foundation you are setting for them – with Jesus Christ Himself being the Chief Cornerstone.§

This is why we lift our voices in unison unto God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. And this is why it is fitting at all times to praise with cheerful voices, the Son of God, the Giver of life.

Therefore, my dear Christians of this precious parish of Saint Demetrios,

Celebrate this holy anniversary with pride and gratitude – especially in the men and

women, and the clergy, who have served this parish over the last one hundred years.

Recognize that the light of Christ is inside each and every one of you, and it will burn as brightly as you allow and cultivate it.

The evening and the morning were the first day.

But there are so many more days yet to come!

Through the intercessions of the Great-Martyr and Myrrh-Bearer Demetrios, whose Holy Name adorns your Church and whose martyric presence overshadows your lives.

Amen.

* Isaiah 65:20.

† Genesis 1:5.

‡ John 1:9.

§ Cf. Ephesians 2:20.

goarch.org