

07/12/2022

Saint Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church at World Trade Center Reopens



The Saint Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church, which was destroyed in the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in New York, reopened on Tuesday.

After 22 years due to financial setbacks and construction delays, it was reopened to the public. Parishioners attended mass inside the new church on the same day the Greek calendar celebrates the Feast Day of Saint Nicholas.

“It means so much. It’s such a source of pride and joy for the Greek Orthodox being able to once again have this jewel box built here on ground zero in the middle of the World Trade Center,” presiding priest Father Andreas Vithoukas told CBS news.

The church, which is also a shrine dedicated to the victims of the attacks, will resume usual services and parish life after undergoing a massive reconstruction.

Designed by celebrated Spanish architect Santiago Calatrava, the church sits in Liberty Park overlooking the Memorial pools and the 9/11 Museum.

Calatrava took inspiration from the great churches in Constantinople. The shallow dome has 40 ribs like the dome of the Hagia Sofia in Turkey. It also serves as a shrine and memorial to those who perished on 9/11.

“The Saint Nicholas parish that graced Lower Manhattan with prayer and worship will once again take up its rightful place at Ground Zero,” The Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America said in a statement.

“The fully functioning Parish will not only bear witness to our Faith and Traditions but as the National Shrine provides a vital service of religious presence and intercessory reconciliation at Ground Zero.

“Where so much destruction was wrought out of hatred, Saint Nicholas will be a sacred place of faith, hope, and love for all people who pass through its doors,” it adds.

Saint Nicolas is a “living cenotaph” in memory of the victims of the World Trade Center

“It’s important for all New Yorkers, not just the parishioners, but all New Yorkers that this is a cenotaph, a living cenotaph in memory of the 3,000 people who were martyred and murdered that day,” said Michael Psaros, chairman of the group Friends of Saint Nicholas.

And while it was consecrated as a Greek Orthodox church, Saint Nicholas is also an ecumenical national shrine, open to all faiths.

Speaking to Greek Reporter recently, Psaros noted that the Greek Orthodox shrine “would be the single most-visited church in New York — and maybe in the U.S.”

“The New York authorities estimate that up to ten million visitors a year would visit this church. It would become the beacon, the symbol of Orthodoxy not just in the U.S., but in the world,” Psaros adds.

Saint Nicholas has been opened for several special occasions over the past few months.

Completion of the project, one of the last pieces of the newly built World Trade Center complex, once seemed in doubt.

The Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America and the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, which owns the World Trade Center, battled in court over where the new church would be built before agreeing to Liberty Park just south of the main trade center site.

A ceremonial groundbreaking was held in 2014, but construction came to a halt in 2017 when the archdiocese fell behind on payments.

Work resumed in 2020 with the goal of opening St. Nicholas in time for the 20th anniversary of the terrorist attacks on Sept. 11, 2021. That goal was not quite met, though the church was ceremonially lighted to mark the anniversary last year.

But on Tuesday, icons depicting heroes of Sept. 11 as well as Christ and the saints watched over a service conducted largely in New Testament Greek.

“This is the resurrection of St. Nicholas Church,” Olga Pavlakos, the vice president of the parish council and a third-generation member of the St. Nicholas community told the Associated Press.

Great Vespers officiated by Bishop Apostolos of Medeia at St. Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church & National Shrine in downtown, NYC. The first service after 22 years after the 9/11 destruction of the only Church at Ground Zero.

greekreporter.com