

21/12/2022

The Christmas Gift of the St. Nicholas National Shrine



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Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

I can barely express my gratitude, enthusiasm, and unmitigated joy for the opening to regular worship and visitation of our precious Saint Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church and National Shrine, which occurred on the Feastday of the Wonderworker of Myra, December 5-6. Once again, this parish - now a National Shrine - is praying at their home, the edifice that stands as a testament to the faith, perseverance, and ineffable generosity of the Greek Orthodox Faithful of America, exemplified by The Friends of Saint Nicholas. We have come on such a long journey, and have arrived through a series of milestones to arrive at these blessed days of the Nativity of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Christmas gift of Saint Nicholas the Wonderworker is that we have such a National Shrine in all its glory. It is a place where the Divine Liturgy takes place on every Sunday and the Holy Days. It is a place where prayers are offered - formally and informally - for the life of the world. And it is a place that bears witness, in the most beautiful and artful way, to the truth of our Orthodox Christian Faith for all the world to see.

Like a graduation ceremony, that is called "Commencement," we are only at the beginning of the new life and ministry of Saint Nicholas. Before 9/11, Saint Nicholas was the little refuge for Lower Manhattan; a place where you could take a moment from your busy day, recollect on the things of God, and light a candle. Sometimes, it was just enough to make the sign of the Cross as you walked by 155 Cedar Street, that last bastion of faith in a sea of commerce.

But now, given all that has happened, the Saint Nicholas National Shrine is a part of history; the history of our Nation and the new realities that have confronted the world since 9/11. Ours is a mission of faithful presence, and of spiritual dynamism on behalf of representing what is best in all religions and especially our Holy Orthodox Christian Church. At Ground Zero, we are the incarnation of the Church of God, the Ecumenical Patriarchate, the Sacred Archdiocese, and the local parish. We are a statement of faith where doubt and fear held sway in the aftermath of the horrors of the sheer inhumanity that we witnessed on 9/11.

Therefore, my beloved friends, as we enter this Christmas celebration, the New Year, the 12 Days of the Feast, and the Holy Theophany, let us give all praise and glory to God for granting us to behold the restoration and indeed, resurrection, of our precious Saint Nicholas. The world knows him as "Santa Claus," so it is our work to bring the Wonderworker of Myra to the fore, and let the world know as much about him.

Merry Christmas to All and a Healthy and Spiritually Prosperous New Year of 2023!

With Paternal Love and Blessings,

†ELPIDOPHOROS
Archbishop of America

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