

09/01/2023

## **HOMILY - By His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros of America At the Divine Liturgy on the Feast of Theophany Saint Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church**



Dear sisters and brothers in Christ,

As we commence the Great Blessing of the Waters, we first hear this hymn – an invitation to our souls:

Φωνὴ Κυρίου ἐπὶ τῶν ὑδάτων βοᾷ λέγουσα· Δεῦτε λάβετε πάντες, Πνεῦμα σοφίας, Πνεῦμα συνέσεως, Πνεῦμα φόβου Θεοῦ, τοῦ ἐπιφανέντος Χριστοῦ.

The voice of the Lord, which is upon the waters, cries out, saying: Come all and receive the Spirit of wisdom, the Spirit of understanding, the Spirit of the awe of God, from Christ in His Epiphany! [\*]

It is the Voice of the Lord that calls to us, continually saying: ‘Come one, come all.’ This Divine utterance echoes through all of Scripture, both Old and New.

In his Prophecy, Isaiah cries out:

Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters....[†]

And our Lord Jesus Christ repeats the invitation, in words we usually remember at the Feast of Mid-Pentecost:

“If you thirst, come to Me and drink! Those who believe in Me, as the Scripture says, ‘Out of the deepest chambers of their being shall rush forth rivers of living water!’” [‡]

And we shall drink! We shall savor the sanctified water on our lips and imbibe the blessing of the Lord. But this blessing is not only for our sanctification. It is for the illumination of our souls on the great feast we call the Festival of Lights.

We are invited to drink and to receive: the Spirit of wisdom, the Spirit of understanding, and the Spirit of the awe of God.

Indeed, my beloved Christians, it is the One and Holy Spirit who divides the grace of God in the water, just as He divided the tongues of fire on the Day of Pentecost. The Spirit of Wisdom – this is the greatest gift for us to navigate our world, the gift that King Solomon prayed to receive, and the Lord heard his supplication and replied:

I now do according to your word. Behold, I give you a wise and discerning mind, so that none like you has been before you and none like you shall arise after you. [§]

True wisdom is to see the world with the eyes of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who is called the “Wisdom of God.” It is to look beyond the surface and to behold the depths of our interconnectedness and our interdependency. It is to love beyond our immediate circle of family and friends. For as the Lord said:

Εἰ ἀγαπᾶτε τοὺς ἀγαπῶντας ὑμᾶς, ποία ὑμῖν χάρις ἐστί;

If you only love those who love you, what joy, what grace, what χάρις, is that for you? [\*\*]

That is why we are called to love our enemies and to pray for their illumination. And this is true wisdom. Beyond science. Beyond the certainty of empirical knowing. Wisdom sees through the appearances of this world, and leads to the next gift of the Spirit: Πνεῦμα συνέσεως.

For when we look at the world with the eyes of Christ, we understand why the

world is the way it is. And we can forgive it, as the Lord did when He was being nailed to the Cross.[††] We can go the extra mile without resentment. We can give the extra effort and the extra help without the need for reciprocity. The Spirit of understanding grants us balance to keep ourselves and the world around us in perspective. And thus, it leads to Πνεῦμα φόβου Θεοῦ.

This is the Spirit of being in awe of God our Creator and of gratitude for His marvelous creation. Not fear in the sense of being cowardly and afraid. Fear in the sense of acknowledging the majesty of our Creator.

Therefore, my beloved friends,

Let us celebrate this feast of Theophany with willing and open hearts.

For the Spirit and the Bride say, “Come!”

And let the one who hears say, “Come!”

And let whoever thirsts, come!

And all you that yearn, come and receive freely of the water of life! [‡‡]

Amen!

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