

14/02/2023

His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros Remarks to Archdiocese District Clergy Syndesmos



My beloved Fathers,

I am very happy to be with you today here in Hempstead, and to enjoy this time of fellowship together. We are fast approaching the Great and Holy Lent, and I know that all of you are busy, making the preparations to guide your flocks through the journey of the Forty Days to Holy Week and Pascha.

This time of year is the very best for the clergy, because it brings us deep into the liturgical experience of our salvation in Christ. But it is also the most demanding, so I ask that each of you make good preparations for the Lenten pilgrimage, and take good care of yourselves, even as you take such good care of your communities.

For all intents and purposes, we have returned to the pre-pandemic universe, at least as far as Parish life is concerned. We are able to offer the full panoply of liturgical services that are the very richness of our Orthodox Faith. But we must not take them for granted. Just because we return to a normal Church schedule, does not necessarily mean that the Faithful will avail themselves of these riches.

We have to make the effort to get the word out, to share the meaning and the context of these special Lenten services, and to promote their

spiritual benefits to our faithful. As priests of the Most High God, each of us has a responsibility to make the mystery of our worship intelligible to our people. Especially in this age of very short attention spans, highlighted by the obsession with cell phones and other devices. We must lead our flocks by example.

That means preaching with intention and teaching with interest. It is no longer enough for a clergyman to simply assume that his parishioners already know the meaning of our symbolic actions and words, because yiayia and pappou told them.

The word σύμβολον literally means two things that are bound together. Σύν – Βάλλω. In the ancient world, contracts were often made by incising a piece of wood, then splitting it in half for each party. When the contract was complete, the

two halves were brought together to make sure they matched. It was an experience of union and indeed, communion.

This is what we desire to instill in our faithful. That they should enter into union with God and live in communion with Him, and with his creation.

Now, I ask you: How many of our faithful understand that this is the purpose of the sacramental, the mystical life of the Church? We receive Holy Communion so that we live in communion. This is the rationale for one of Lent's most beautiful services, the Liturgy of the Pre-Sanctified Gifts - so that we maintain our Eucharistic communion with God.

Therefore, my brothers:

Let us all apply ourselves to the days before us. And let us guide our flocks like good shepherds, who lead not from the front, where the sheep cannot be seen, but from the rear, so that none may be lost.

Connecting our people to the meaning behind the symbolical actions of our liturgical services open the door to their personal understanding. When they feel that they have been bound to the Lord as in a σύμβολον, they will live more fully, attend the services more frequently, and follow the Lord Jesus - the great Shepherd of all the sheep - more faithfully.

I wish you a blessed and spiritually prosperous Great Lent.

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