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# **His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros Opening Prayer, Remarks, and Closing Prayer February 14, 2023 Georgetown University (Copley Hall) Washington, DC**



Opening Prayer

Beloved Brothers and Sisters,

Let us join together in prayer:

O God, the Creator and Sustainer of the Universe, we call upon you from the depths of our hearts in this hour of our desperate need, as we struggle to face the unspeakable loss in Türkiye and Syria:

Grant rest to the souls of the tens of thousands who have perished in the earthquakes, which have crushed the lives of innocent women, men, and children;

Grant consolation and solace to all those who have lost parents, children, loved ones, and the hope for a better tomorrow;

Look down in mercy upon those who are suffering still, and make smooth the path of vital necessities and aid, that no more should be lost due to the inadequacy of our response to this disaster that is so far beyond our comprehension.

We ask you, O Merciful and Compassionate God: to grant to all who strive to provide assistance the strength and grace to persevere in the face of incalculable adversity;

And to grant unto us, gathered together today, the spirit of mutual and fraternal love and respect;

That we, as leaders of our faith communities, may provide the vision and wisdom to our people, so that they may open their hearts and minds to the needs of others,

And offer their tangible and intangible support, to provide relief for the living, and intercessions for those who have perished;

As we yet proclaim your goodness and mercy, from generation to generation.

Amen.

Remarks

Dear Brothers and Sisters:

Beloved Friends in the Faith of Abraham:

We are gathered here at Georgetown, this shining institution of learning in our Nation's Capital, to pray together, to weep together, to speak with one voice and one heart, for the inconceivable loss of over 37,000 people, our fellow human beings in Türkiye and in Syria. As someone born in and reared in Türkiye, where I have spent the majority of my life, I am shaken to the core by the sheer magnitude of the loss.

I want to thank all of you for your prayerful and indeed, loving, presence here today. To feel this solidarity with all of you is a rare comfort in these days of such devastation and destruction.

Our dear friend, Rabbi Arthur Schneier, from the Appeal of Conscience Foundation, wanted to be with us today, but the travel was simply not possible. He is with us in spirit, and his spirit of interfaith mutuality, respect, and understanding is certainly manifest today. I will speak with him upon my return to New York and tell him of the love and the compassion that we have all witnessed here.

There is no shortage of grief among all our communities, but the loss of Antakya – ancient Antioch – “where the Disciples were first called Christians,” is especially hard to bear<sup>[1]</sup> — and personally for me, coming from that area on the side of my mother, having lost four members of my family.

We have all been working day and night to set up Earthquake Relief Fund, and to coordinate our responses from afar. I am especially grateful to International Orthodox Christian Charities for their swift and effective response in both Türkiye and Syria. And I cannot fail to mention the extraordinary labors of the diplomatic communities to organize and expedite relief work. You are all to be thanked again and again.

This ruinous, cataclysmic event has brought us together in bonds of solidarity, which are intensified by the glimmers of hope that we see in the faces of those miracles still being pulled alive from the devastation.

Like the hope left in Pandora's box, there are miraculous moments that remind us that all is not lost.

And more than these rare and wondrous rescues, we see how the noble efforts to save as many as possible is bringing together the human family – who are so often divided by religion, race, politics, nationalism, ethno-phyletism, and economic disparity. We have witnessed some uplifting diplomatic collaborations. The recent visit of Nikos Dendias, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Greece, to Türkiye and his meeting with Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, mark the fraternal commitment and solidarity of countries. This is an action prompted by a genuine spirit of compassion. It comes as no surprise that the first rescue team deployed in the region was from Greece. The humanitarian synergy between Greece, Türkiye as well as Israel is indeed a sign of hope and comfort for many. This shows good neighborly relations in those difficult days.

My friends – and I do not call you “friends” lightly – as horrible as this event is, we can see the opportunity for transformation in our shared humanity.

When hands are frantically digging through rubble and debris to reach that one weak voice, and lift back to life the soul trapped underneath the appalling aftermath of these quakes, no one asks which hand is Muslim or Christian, Jewish or even atheist. No one asks which nation or tribe. No one asks for motive or reason. Just keep digging!

We all have been digging down deep into our souls to make some sense of this shocking tragedy. Our hands are working together to bring as many back to life as possible, to give the survivors a real chance at rebuilding their lives, and to provide closure and dignity to the tens of thousands who have perished.

My dear, dear friends:

My heart is broken over this catastrophe, but praying with you, standing with you, embracing you today has kept that heart beating with the faint echo of hope.

Let us pray that whatever kindness, whatever goodness, whatever compassion has been engendered in humanity's soul by the courage, resilience, and perseverance in Türkiye and Syria, will redound to a better world for those who survive, and for all of us who have found the better angels of our nature in our loving response to this unspeakable tragedy.

Closing Prayer

O Lord our God, you have promised that when two or three are gathered together in your name, you will grant their requests. Fulfill now, O God, our petitions for mercy, and send forth strength and comfort to all those facing this greatest of trials and tribulations.

Be with the survivors and all who have endured this terrible loss.

Fortify the responders and all those who offer comfort and aid.

Soften the hearts of the world, so that every nation may behold in the faces of the people of Türkiye and Syria their own brothers and sisters, sons and daughters, fathers and mothers,

And pour forth from their abundance for the pressing needs of such a time as this.

Remember, O God, all who have perished – they are in your hands now, where pain and suffering have vanished.

Comfort their families and friend with insight and understanding, so that they can bear this loss.

And grant unto us that we may embrace one another as members of the one human family that shares this planet Earth, created by you,

So that we may live lives of service, benefit, and hold the welfare of strangers as dearly as our own.

With gratitude we bow our souls before your majesty and wisdom.

Amen.

[1] Acts 11:26.

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