

06/03/2023

## **Greeting by His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros of America To the San Francisco Metropolis Bay Area Parish Leadership**



Your Eminence Metropolitan Gerasimos of San Francisco

Your Grace[s] and dear Father[s],

Beloved sisters and brothers in Christ,

Καλή Σαρακοστή!

I am delighted to be with you this evening. I express my gratitude and appreciation to Father Peter and the leadership of Holy Cross here in Belmont, for hosting this dinner and providing this forum.

Earlier today, I was at a similar event with the Parish Council and ministry heads of the Annunciation Cathedral of San Francisco, and I must say how impressed I am by the lay leadership of the Metropolis parishes.

Your dedication to your fellow parishioners is inspiring, because you bring your intensity and your joy to them as you serve the Church. As you all know so well, service to the Church is so much more than service within an institution – whether it be the local parish, the Metropolis, or the Archdiocese. Service is always, first and foremost, ministry to the people of God, your brothers and sisters in Christ.

Holding the members of your community as you would family is not the easiest thing to do – especially when there might be strong differences of opinion among parish members. But like family disagreements, there is always a way to do so in a loving and respectful manner that is mindful of just how important the other person is to you. When every member of the parish feels valued and appreciated – no matter the quality or quantity of their contribution – the health of the parish will inevitably thrive.

For the Church is the Body of Christ. And like a physical body, pain, illness, or distress in a particular part of the body brings disorder to the entirety of the body.

This is why Saint Paul, in his First Letter to the Church at Corinth, says the following:

For, just as the body is one but has many members – yet all the members are of one body even though they are many in number – the body is one. This is how Christ is as well. ... If one member suffers, all the members empathize; and if one member is praised, all the members rejoice. \*

We are one Body, one community, one unified entity – whether as a Patriarchate, an Archdiocese, a Metropolis, or a parish. In each element, there is a wholeness that is bestowed by God Himself. And because we are one, our empathy extends throughout the Body – from head to toe, as they say.

Therefore, as you journey through Holy and Great Lent, think of any and all the members of your parishes and communities that may be hurting. Reach out to everyone, even those deemed unreachable; for there is no place that is outside the loving reach of God. He stretched out His arms upon the Cross for every human being, so as to encompass them with love and forgiveness, and to give them a place in His Heavenly Kingdom, of which the Church is the foreshadowing upon the earth.

May you all rejoice in the health of your parishes this Lent, and arrive at Pascha having “attained the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.” †

May the Lord richly reward you for your precious diakonia!

Καλή Σαρακοστή!

Photo: Kostas Petrakos

\* I Corinthians 12:12, 26.

† Ephesians 4:13.

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