

Homily by His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros of America At the Divine Liturgy - Veneration of the Cross



Dear Family of Hellenic College and Holy Cross,

What better place, in all of our Archdiocese, to observe the Sunday of the Veneration of the Holy Cross – than in this Sacred Space, this glorious Chapel of the Holy Cross?

Today, the Precious and Life-giving Cross of the Lord is offered to us as a mystical signpost, marking the Mid-Point of our Lenten journey. At the same time, we pause for a moment beneath the refreshing shade of this Tree of Life, so as to hear a faint echo of Pascha coming toward us in the melodies of today’s canon. And in the first blossoms of Spring that adorn the Cross, we see “writ large” the message of the Gospel of re-birth that infuses this Lenten season with the promise of new life in Christ.

Indeed, my beloved Christians, our Veneration of the Precious and Life-giving Cross today is a miraculous mystery; for we embrace that instrument of torment and death, and we receive consolation and life. The miracle of the Cross is that it so utterly turns upside down and inside out all of our assumptions about life and death.

The Lord used the Cross as a ladder to descend unto death and destroy it by His own death. And we use the Cross as a ladder to ascend unto life, and eternal life at that!

But this ladder is also a bridge. It is a means of connection to one another on the basis of what the Cross means, stated by our Lord on the night in which He gave Himself for the life of the world:

Αὕτη ἐστὶν ἡ ἐντολὴ ἣ ἐμή, ἵνα ἀγαπᾶτε ἀλλήλους καθὼς ἠγάπησα ὑμᾶς. Μείζονα ταύτης ἀγάπην οὐδεὶς ἔχει, ἵνα τις τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ θῇ ὑπὲρ τῶν φίλων αὐτοῦ.

“This is my commandment: love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has

no one than this, to sacrifice your life for your friends.” *

As Christians, as Orthodox Christians, we are bound to this commandment, which rises above every canon, every dogma, and every tradition that we hold so dear, and which this Institution seeks to convey to you. For if we do not hold this commandment first and foremost, everything else the Church truly makes no sense.

That is what makes this war in Ukraine so pitiable, and from the perspective of our faith, so unjust. The commandment of the Lord to love one another is replaced by the commandment of secular powers to kill one another. And we behold Orthodox Christians at war as death-dealers, rather than death-healers.

The Cross is our best and greatest reminder, that for all our religiosity, for all our liturgical mastery, for all our academic superiority – if we are without this love for one another, the love that will offer the ultimate sacrifice, then we are living proofs of the words of Saint Paul:

If I speak with tongues of mortals and of Angels – but have no love – I would be no more than the clatter of clanging metal, or at best a sounding cymbal. And if I have the gift of prophecy and I know all the mysteries and all mystical knowledge; even if I possess the whole of faith to dislodge even mountains – but I have no love – I am nothing! Even if I give away all my possessions to feed the hungry; even if I surrender my body to be burned – but have no love – it does me no good. †

So, then, sisters and brothers, how are we going to read the signpost of the Precious Cross today? In what direction does it point us toward at this mid-point of the Fast?

I hope that it is in the direction of one another. That we are convicted in our hearts, and compelled to love one another. Compelled not by guilt, or obligation, or an egoistic drive to feel like we are better than those around us. But compelled by the inexhaustible and irrefutable love of Christ for us – just as we are, without condition, without expectation.

And so, here is the best measure of your theological education and learning. Here is the true test of your truthfulness before God.

I pray that your stopping at the signpost of the Cross today is a refreshing pause for you on the way to Pascha, and that you will seize upon the orientation that the Lord is directing.

Devote yourselves to your studies. But devote yourselves more to loving one another in purity of heart and in equanimity of mind.

Thus, you will all arrive at the glorious Resurrection of our Lord, and in the Kingdom of Heaven.

Amen.

* John 15:12-13.

† I Corinthians 13:1-3.

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