

# Archbishop Elpidophoros Homily for the First Bridegroom Service - Great and Holy Monday 2023



Beloved Sisters and Brothers in Christ:

I am so very happy to have been with parishes of Maryland for the commencement of Holy Week, and tonight, I end this visit to your fair State in this sublime Cathedral.

We have now arrived at the somber services of Holy Week, so that may prepare ourselves to greet the Lord, Who is Coming to His voluntary Passion.

This morning was glorious! His Entry into the Holy City was attended by adoring throngs, who cast their garments, and the palms and branches before Him. But tonight, the glory of Lord is hidden. We look upon the Bridegroom of the Church – the One Who loves us beyond all others. And as the Prophet Isaiah says:

He has no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him. He is despised and rejected of men; a Man of Sorrows, and acquainted with grief.... \*

He is the Bridegroom in strange vesture.

Instead of a crown of the sun, moon, and stars, He wears a crown of thorns.

Instead of the garments of light which adorn His Godhead,† there is the purple of mockery.

Instead of His precious hands being praised by their works that established the firmament,‡ they are bound as a common criminal.

And in place of the rod of iron with which He shall rule the Nations, to break in pieces the gates of death like a potter's vessels, § He holds a mere reed, to emphasize His humiliation.

This the challenge of Holy Week – to recognize in such a Bridegroom, the very God Who created us, and Who loves us just as we are. It is hard to admit that the humiliation, the torture, and the death that this week holds for our Lord Jesus Christ, is accomplished for our sake. Why do we need such a Bridegroom? Why do we need such a Divine Lover?

Because through sin, through resentment, through envy, through pride, and through our lack of love and generosity toward others, we are dwelling in darkness. That is why He comes to us in the middle of the night, ἐν τῷ μέσῳ τῆς νυκτός, in the middle of our dark night of the soul, to find us just as we are, that we may discover who we really are.

The garments that He wears are not showy, extravagant decorations meant to inspire awe and attraction. They are tokens of His love.

His Crown of Thorns brings forth His Divine Blood to nourish us.

His purple robe of ridicule covers our sins.

His hands are bound so that we might be set free.

And the reed that is meant to disgrace Him, is a reminder of His gentleness in judgment with the world. As the Prophet says:

A bruised reed He shall not break....\*\*

The Lord knows that we are but reeds, blown by every gust of wind. We are fragile, and we bruise all too easily. But the Lord will never break us. His judgments are righteous and true; never harsh or cruel.

Therefore, my beloved Christians:

Let us welcome the Bridegroom Who comes to us tonight. He comes to remind us that He is ready to embrace us as His own. He comes to claim his Bride, which is the Church. And the dowry He will pay is greater than anyone has ever paid, because He paid it for everyone.

If we will receive Him, He will carry us all into the Heavenly Bridal Chamber, where we will live with Him in eternity in the resurrection and restoration of all things.

Through His grace and love for all humankind, together with His Father and All Holy Spirit, One God, praised and glorified forever. Amen.

\* Isaiah 53:2-3.

† Cf. Psalm 18:1 (LXX).

‡ Cf. Psalm 103:2 (LXX).

§ Cf. Revelation 2:27.

\*\* Isaiah 42:3.

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