

Archbishop Elpidophoros Homily for the Third Bridegroom - Matins of Holy Wednesday



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Once again, I am here with this wonderful community of Kimisis tis Theotokou in Brooklyn, for the Third Bridegroom Service, and the most beautiful Hymn of Kassiani.

The Gospel reading for this Matins of Holy Wednesday has an unusual detail, which resonates especially with us, the Greek Orthodox of today. It says:

Some Greeks who had come to worship at the Feast approached Philip (the one from Bethsaïda in Galilee). “Sir,” they asked him, “we want to see Jesus.” Philip went to Andrew and told him, and Andrew and Philip together related the request to Jesus. Jesus responded to them, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. [1]

In a way, the Lord’s response is curious, if not surprising. Who were these Greeks? Were they merely Greek-speakers, or were they something more intrinsic to Hellas?

One thing is for sure, they were speaking Greek with the Disciples, adding more proof to the theory that even the Lord Jesus spoke Greek, which was the common language of the Roman World of the First Century.

Perhaps these “Greeks” came from as far away as Ioannina in Epirus, for we know that there were communities of Greek Jews there at this time, part of the larger Jewish Diaspora that surrounded the Mediterranean Sea.

And coming to Jerusalem for the Passover was the aspiration of every Jewish person – and continues even to our own day. During the first Holy Week, in which our Lord gave His life for the life of the world, Jerusalem was teeming with many foreigners from throughout the Roman Empire. We often forget that the Lord was born into a world of tremendous diversity, linked together by Roman roads and Roman legions.

The Greeks who came to Jerusalem for this Passover were doubtless very devoted persons – people who had waited for their whole lifetime for the opportunity to celebrate the most sacred Feast of the Jewish People – Passover – in the Holiest of

Holies, the Temple of God's glory upon earth.

But they had heard of Jesus. They must have known that He was a Galilean Rabbi of note, and some people even said that he was a miracle worker – a Θαυματουργός.

Our Lord Jesus Christ knew that His message – His Gospel – was for the entire world. Not just for the Jewish People. That is why he conversed with Samaritans and the all outcast people, like tax collectors, lepers, prostitutes, and even Roman legionnaires, the persecutors of His People and His land.

When these Greeks sought out an audience with Him, the Lord understood that His Message was reaching beyond the borders of Israel. He saw in these Greeks the world coming to Him. And in that moment, He exclaimed: “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified;” meaning – the time had come for His sacrifice for the life of the world.

Very often, we Greeks underappreciate the role that our culture, our language, and our civilization had in the propagation of the Gospel. Without us, Christianity might have remained a Jewish sect.

We shall never know – at least in this life – whether those nameless Greeks who sought out the Lord Jesus ever had the opportunity to encounter Him. The Scripture is silent on this point. But we do know that the Gospel took root in Greece when Saint Paul arrived, and that in city after city, and island after island, the Christian Faith was planted and thrives to this very day.

I say this not to inspire arrogance, but thankfulness. We Greek Orthodox should be the most grateful of all Christians, for we have been given the charge to bring glory to our Lord, God, and Savior Jesus Christ.

When these ancient Greeks sought out the Lord before His Passion, they signaled the Lord's exaltation upon the Cross and, through His Resurrection, throughout the Oikoumene.

Let us also proclaim His glory in this and every Holy Week; proud of our part in the work of salvation, and grateful for the inheritance that live the Gospel in our Holy Orthodox Church. Amen.

Καλή Ανάσταση σε όλους.

Photo: GOARCH/Dimitrios Panagos

[1] John 12:20 – 23.

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