

12/06/2023

Homily by His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros of America at the Great Vespers on the Feast of the Holy Apostle Bartholomew



Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Christ is in our midst!

Once again, we engage in an ecumenical salute to the Spiritual Father of Orthodox Christianity, His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, Archbishop of Constantinople-New Rome. We have come again to the magnificent Saint Bartholomew's Church, one of the great aesthetic achievements of Manhattan.

I wish to express my gratitude to Bishop Andrew Dietsche of the Episcopal Diocese of New York, and to the Right Reverend Dean Wolfe, Rector of this extraordinary parish, for their Abrahamic hospitality in welcoming us for this festal vespers.

We celebrate the Ecumenical Patriarch's nameday here in a church of another Christian community, because His All-Holiness is the very definition of ecumenicity. He, following in the footsteps of our Lord, God, and Savior Jesus Christ, is continuously reaching out to those beyond his own circle and family of faith. The Ecumenical Patriarch is a spiritual father for all people, whether they realize it or not.

For His All-Holiness has deep concern and care for all of creation. We know of his steady and strong advocacy for the environment – his commitment to a sustainable planet for the whole human family, all eight billion of us.

How can one love creation but disdain the creatures who inhabit it? It makes no sense, and it is contrary to the Gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. His All-Holiness acts like a spiritual wheel in the world – holding the traditions fast in the hub of the Holy Mother Church. But he reaches out as well through spokes that extend in love and compassion to all people. No one is ever beneath or unworthy of the love of God. How could it be otherwise for us?

Being in this church, borrowed from another Christian tradition, is a sign of our expansive and embracing love for all people. It is a symbolic act that many will try to interpret through their own filters of grievance, prejudice, and lack of basic human kindness. But the truth of our presence and prayers here tonight is the same as the vision of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, which he enunciated a few years ago:

It is our belief and, at the same time, our hope that Christianity can be viewed as a religion of love and dialogue. The visions of the Gospel are what the Orthodox Church seeks to incarnate and support in the modern world. *

Because of this vision, His All-Holiness has stood – an immovable rock of faith and piety – against the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the complicity of the Russian Orthodox Church in its shameful support for this unconscionable war of aggression.

The Church is to be a place of love, acceptance and redemption. It was the Lord Himself Who said:

I will never cast out the one who comes to Me. †

What a difference from those who promise the Kingdom for being death-dealers, rather than death-healers!

His All-Holiness has now served on the Apostolic Throne of the First-Called Disciple Saint Andrew longer than any hierarch in the history of Christianity. This alone stands as a cause for great rejoicing and gladness. But more than his long and glorious tenure, he has opened the Mother Church's embrace to the world, by engaging world leaders at every level. And now, with World Orthodoxy on the brink of fragmentation, he has stood firm for the truth of the Gospel. The truth that we are subjects of the Prince of Peace, not the common warlords of this world. The truth that the love of God is for all People, without reservation and without condition, as the Apostle reminds us:

“But God gave sure and certain proof of His own love for us, because while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” ‡

Therefore, brothers and sisters in Christ,

Let our evening prayer arise like incense among all the glories within this sanctuary.

Let us give thanks to our Merciful God, Who has bestowed upon the Church and the entire human family such a person as the Great Ecumenical Patriarch, His All-

Holiness Bartholomew – Archbishop of Constantinople-New Rome.

And let us cry out: Many Years, Most Holy Master!

Ἐτη Πολλά, Παναγιώτατε Δέσποτα!

Christ is truly in our midst!

Who was, and is, and shall ever be.

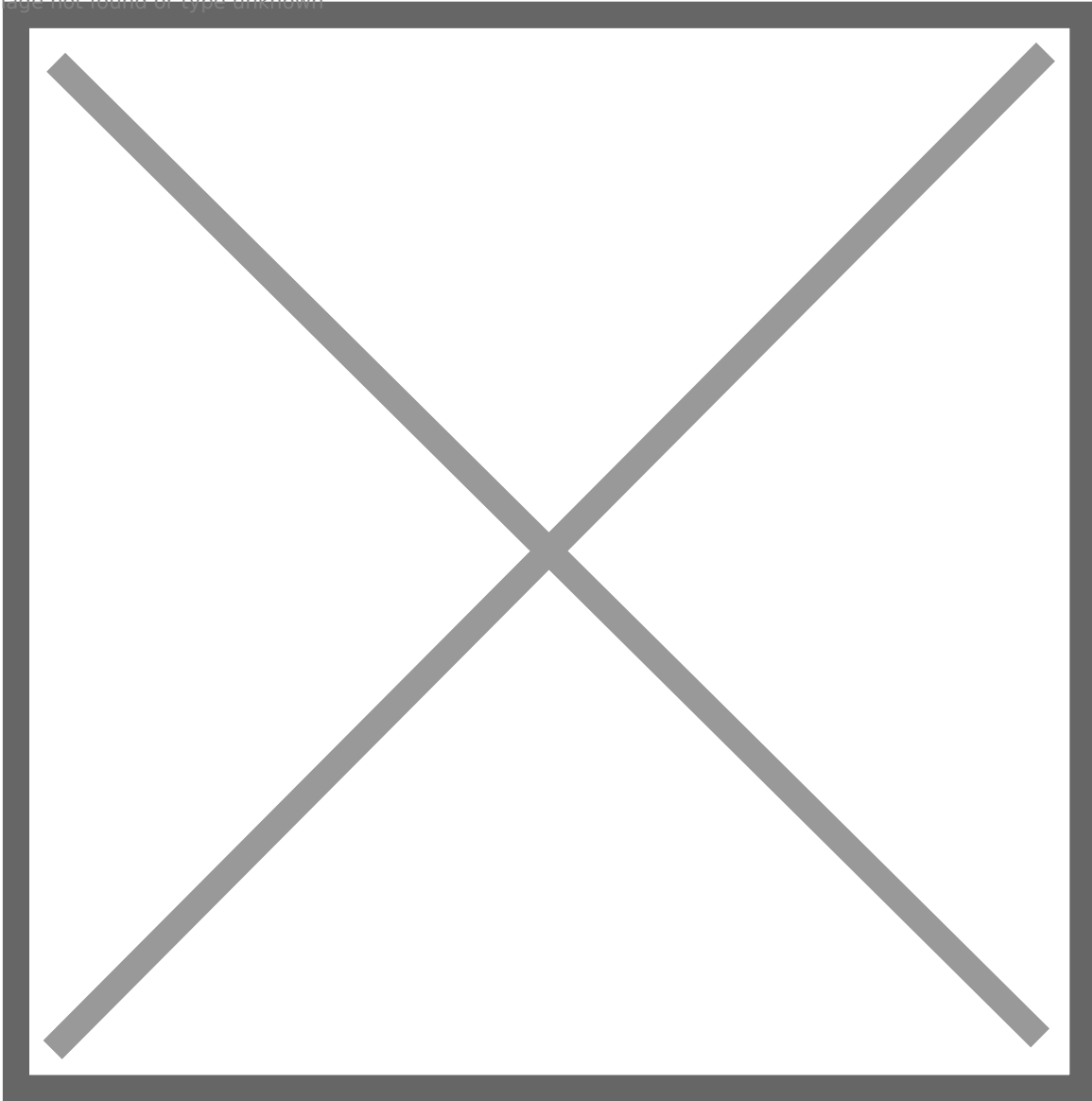
Amen.

* <https://evz.ro/bartolomeu-i-patriarhul-constantinopolului-biserica-trebuie-sa-incurajeze-libertatea-nu-dominatia.html>.

† John 6:37.

‡ Romans 5:8.

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