

28/07/2023

Archepiscopal Encyclical on the Day of Mourning for Hagia Sophia



July 30, 2023

Unto the Most Reverend and Right Reverend Hierarchs, Pious Priests and Deacons, Monks and Nuns, Presidents and Members of the Parish Councils, Honorable Archons of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, Members of Leadership 100, Day and Afternoon Schools, Philoptochos Societies, Youth, Greek Orthodox Organizations, and entirety of the Christ-loving Plenitude of the Sacred Archdiocese of America:

“Wisdom has built a house for herself ...” (Proverbs 9:1)

My beloved brothers and sisters in Christ,

The Great Church of Holy Wisdom, Hagia Sophia, is a living monument to the glory of our Orthodox Christian Faith and a visible symbol of all that is best in the worship and liturgy of our Church. Even after centuries of servicing an alien purpose, the magnificence of the edifice is unparalleled. Its seizure and second conversion to use as a mosque, on July 24, 2020 (ironically, the anniversary of the

Treaty of Lausanne), is a day of mourning for all Orthodox Christian People, as well as for all people of religious conviction. As is known, there was no need for Hagia Sophia to be taken over; there is an abundance of mosques in modern-day Istanbul. Rather, this was an act of political theater, using religion as a trope to manipulate the populace.

Three years later, we continue to hope and work for a return to at least the status of the Great Church as a museum, which would manifest the iconographic masterpieces and the original intention upon which Her builders raised the stones of Wisdom's House. For like the stones who would cry out on Palm Sunday if the Disciples were silenced, (Luke 19:40), there are manifold voices of the ages enshrined in Hagia Sophia, who even now cry out for diversity in the Republic of Türkiye, the diversity that makes the country truly grand.

Let us pray that the House of Wisdom with Her canopy of light, or, as the historian Procopius says, "the golden dome suspended from Heaven," will one day be restored to a place that welcomes all people. Anything less can be endured, but only by prayer and fasting. Until that happy day, let us build the House of Wisdom in our hearts, where, by love and forgiveness, we can always worship within the Great Church in our deepest souls.

With paternal love in Christ,

† ELPIDOPHOROS

Archbishop of America

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