

10/08/2023

Homily by His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros of America At the Paraklesis Service (August 8, 2023)



Reverend Fathers,

Beloved brothers and sisters in Christ,

Gathering with you here in Astoria, the beating heart of the Greek-American experience, I convey to all of you the blessings of these days of fasting and preparation for the Dormition of the Ever-Virgin Theotokos.

In every icon of her kind and loving visage, we see the title that flanks her image – Μήτηρ Θεοῦ, the Mother of God. But she is more than God's Mother, the woman who gave birth to our Lord Jesus Christ. She is our mother as well.

Why do I say this? Because through her powerful intercessions, the entire family of God – the Church – is sheltered and protected throughout the ages. If the Church is

the “Body of Christ,” as Saint Paul says, then she is the one who brought it into being, in every way that a mother gives life and love. She guards us like a mother, and as we chant in tonight’s Service:

Πρεσβεία θερμή, καὶ τεῖχος ἀπροσμάχητον,

ἐλέους πηγή, τοῦ κόσμου καταφύγιον...

A fervent prayer, and wall most unshakable

A merciful spring and shelter of all mankind...

Our Most Holy Theotokos is all of these for us. And first and foremost, she is a fervent prayer. But her fervor is more than prayer. It is advocacy; it is petitioning on our behalf. She is our embassy to God for us. She is our Ambassador to the Court of Heaven. And her advocacy is warm, fervent, urgent, and even heated! She will not broker anyone or anything to come against us! She is the greatest defender of Christians, and she is unsleeping in her care for us.

We know that the devil himself is named “accuser,” or “Satan,” in the Old Testament. He is called this, because he comes against us in our minds and hearts. He wishes us to lose hope, to lose faith and, ultimately, to lose our love for one another, and for God.

To answer this evil, that would drain us of our spiritual energy, our Panagia is our fervent intercessor. She never ceases to intercede on our behalf. That is why we chant unto her in these holy days of the Fast of the Dormition. She defends each and every one of us, even when we condemn ourselves.

Secondly, the Virgin Mother of God is also our unshakeable wall. Here in this beautiful church, we are surrounded by walls adorned with the images of the Saints. They remind us that we have Heavenly Guardians who keep watch over our souls and bodies. But the Theotokos is herself a “wall unshakeable” around the entirety of the Church.

In Constantinople of old, which had peerless walls that were impenetrable for centuries, the Faithful always paraded the icon of the Virgin on these walls, when they were under attack. This is because they knew that, even if the man-made walls were breached, the Faith would never be. For the Virgin is the invisible wall that surrounds the Church at all times, and protects the Holy Faith.

Thirdly, the Theotokos is a fountain of mercy. Again, in Constantinople to this day, the Shrine of Zoodohos Peghe continues to flow and remains of the utmost

importance. The Virgin is life-giving because all life is a gift of mercy from God. It was from God's merciful love that we have been created, and by that same mercy-filled love we have been redeemed.

And whose love is the first and most important love that any child knows? A mother's love. Thus, even our Lord Jesus Christ learned of love in His Holy Mother's bosom. That is why she is the wellspring of mercy for us all, because she had that role with her Son, and that part to play in our salvation.

Finally, we call her a "shelter for all mankind," but, more precisely, a "refuge for the world." The Virgin is the place where everyone can find shelter – spiritual, emotional and mental. She has a heart that is open to every human being, because she shared our nature, even as she freely and willingly shared that same nature with God, her Only-Begotten Son, Jesus Christ.

My beloved Christians,

In these days of the Fast, let us earnestly pray to the Mother of God, acknowledging all her many benefits for our sake.

May she always be our Constant Advocate, our Wall of Protection, our Fountain of God's many mercies, and our Mighty Refuge, for she is the Mother of us all!

Amen.

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