

08/09/2023

His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros Toast at the Ecumenical Luncheon Congregación Kol Shearith Israel Panama City, Panama



Dear Rabbi Gustavo (Kraselnik) – our host today,

Your Excellency Archbishop Ulloa,

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

The Abrahamic hospitality of this fellowship today is such a cause of joy and gratitude for me, because your embrace of my presence here in wondrous Panama is an example of the best and the brightest in true interfaith and ecumenical cooperation.

Panamanian “philoxenia” (if you will allow me to employ the Greek word for “hospitality”) is legendary, and you have worthily represented it today.

Truly, my esteemed brethren, if our human family could achieve a measure of the hospitality that is manifested in all our cultures and civilizations, our modern world would be a better place. And this is where all religions have a role to play, for all faiths practice the “love of the stranger” that is the fundamental meaning of hospitality, the literal meaning of the Greek, “philoxenia.”

For the stranger is vulnerable, like Moses in Egypt, who named his son, “Gershom,” for as he said: “I have been a stranger in a strange land.”*

The appearance of the Angels to Abraham and Sarah at the Oak of Mamre becomes for the Orthodox Christian Church a theophany of the Holy Trinity and the most famous icon in the world.

Jesus taught that every human being is our neighbor and that we should love them as we love ourselves. †

Even the ancient Greeks invoked Ζεὺς Ξένιος, the patron of hospitality, and the avenger of those who refused to welcome the stranger into their midst.

When I am in the midst of such a demonstration of loving welcome, I feel very much at home, in the presence of true human brothers and sisters.

In our ecumenical and interfaith endeavors, I pray that we will always be committed to tearing down the supposed walls that seem to separate us, and to use those planks to build even larger tables of fellowship and welcome.

We all belong to this planet earth, and the generations that come after us will share it as well. Therefore, I lift my glass in gratitude to you and in honor of our common human nature. May we all find the grace and strength to always teach and preach this fundamental unity of humankind.

To your health and the health of beautiful Panama!

* Exodus 2:22.

† Matthew 22:39.

Photos: GOARCH/Brittainy Newman

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