

14/09/2023

His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros of America Great Vespers of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross Rassophoria and Stavrophoria Holy Cross Chapel - Hellenic College/Holy Cross Brookline, Massachusetts

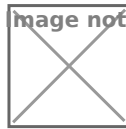


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Your Eminences,

Your Graces,

Beloved Brothers and Sisters of this Sacred Community of

Hellenic College and Holy Cross,

This evening, we commence our solemn observances of the Glorious Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy, Precious, and Life-giving Cross. As your Archbishop, I stand here in the presence of the Hierarchy, Clergy, Faculty, and Administration – to convey to you, the Student Body – a word of encouragement and exhortation, especially for those who receive their crosses and rassa in tonight's ceremony.

You are one of the largest classes to matriculate here in years, and this is a hopeful sign for the life of our Church in America. Without trained clergy, the future of our Church will hover between faith and doubt. And we have so much to offer to the wider American society – treasures of spirituality and culture – that we must have the individuals capable of representing and cultivating our Orthodox Faith of Christ.

Therefore, all of you who are studying on this Holy Hill have a profound responsibility to apply yourselves with great care and diligence in the pursuit of your studies. But even more so, you must take this time of instruction – of διδασχῇ – to cultivate your inner spiritual life.

Although you will learn about how to perform the rites and ceremonies of our Church – τὰ τελετουργικά – from some of the finest teachers in the Nation, you must still be responsible for implanting the meaning of all this symbolism within

your hearts and souls. And not only planting these seeds of faith, but nourishing them, and cultivating them for the harvest that feeds the Church.

And the same goes for the words of teaching – whether it is a reading from Scripture, the Holy Fathers and Elders, or the lecture you are attending – these words gain their meaning by you bringing your actions, speech, and thoughts into harmony with them. If we do not establish this balance in our lives, we fall into the trap of being hypocrites, which, if you remember, was a specific complaint that our Lord Jesus Christ had against the Pharisees, and those whose religiosity was on display for all the world to see.

My beloved community, let us never mistake the menu for the meal! You cannot spiritually feed the world – yourself included – with pictures and words printed on a bill of fare. You need and want the real thing! And that is what our faithful need and want as well. Not just another priest or teacher who know the words ... but one who does the deeds. One who acts upon the Faith, in concert with its Divine Message, the Kerygma of Christ.

And that Kerygma is the Message of the Cross! As the Apostle says in another place:

But God forbid that I glory in anything except the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ! – through Which the world is crucified to me, and I to the world! *

Here is the Everlasting Gospel of the Lord! †

Here is the meaning of all that we do and say.

For if we do not act and speak in accordance with the love that brought the Lord Jesus Christ to ascend the Cross and offer Himself up for the life of the world, then we are hypocrites. People with the mask of piety, and our real life is disguised, as the Lord said of those Pharisees and Hypocrites:

You are like secret graves that people walk over without realizing it. ‡

Therefore, my beloved students and faculty, and all with an interest in the well-being and usefulness of our beloved Σχολή, let us strive together to fulfill our spiritual potential above all, even as we learn the history and the stories of the Church. As it is said:

Ἡ γνῶσις φυσιοῖ, ἡ δὲ ἀγάπη οἰκοδομεῖ.

Knowledge inflates, but love edifies. §

Only the love of the Cross can truly build up the Church into the Body of Christ – the One Who deigned to hang upon the Cross for all our sakes.

Education is a life-long process, and its success is not manifest merely in a title or degree. Our education's success can only be measured by how we are transformed within, and how much we desire, and are capable of, sharing the transfigured life with others – always based in love.

I close my exhortation to this fellowship of faith with these words:

... δίωκε δὲ δικαιοσύνην, πίστιν, ἀγάπην, εἰρήνην μετὰ τῶν ἐπικαλουμένων τὸν Κύριον ἐκ καθαρᾶς καρδίας.

... pursue, then, righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call upon the Lord with from a pure heart. **

Let this be your year at Hellenic College and Holy Cross. A year of learning both the externals, and the internals of our Faith. Orthodoxy and Orthopraxy. And you will become what this School is always called to be:

A place of pure and unalloyed Faith;

A place of Hope for the Church of tomorrow;

And a place of Love for our Lord and God, and for one another.

So be it. Γένοιτο. Amen.

* Galatians 6:14.

† Cf. Revelation 14:6.

‡ Luke 11:44.

§ I Corinthians 8:2.

** II Timothy 2:22

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