

02/10/2023

Archbishop Elpidophoros Homily at the Great Vespers of Consecration Danbury, CT



Your Grace, Bishop Andonios

Beloved Clergy,

Beloved Christians of Danbury,

This evening, in this magnificent Temple dedicated to the Assumption of our Holy Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary, we embark upon this journey of the Consecration of this place to the everlasting worship of our Holy Triune God.

Tonight, with the ancient rites of our Holy Orthodox Church, we commence the Consecration – the setting apart for all eternity – of your Temple – you Ναός. There is something truly fitting for a Church dedicated to the Koímēsis of the Virgin – that you should honor the one who bodily ascended into the Realm and Kingdom of the Spirit, by this spiritual dedication of the material space in which you honor her. You have worshipped here for many years, and spared no expense in the adornment. I can see, and I am moved, by the love, devotion, and care with which you have built up and ornamented this Temple of the Lord.

In this Great Vespers, we have accomplished the deposition upon the Altar of the

Holy Relics of The Great Martyrs of our Faith, who will rest their tonight, illuminated by the Vigil Lamp. This reminds us of the living presence of these Saint among us, and is analogous to the Proskomide Service that every priest performs before a Divine Liturgy. The fact that the Holy Relics rest upon the diskarion – the paten – reinforces that imagery.

The deposition of the Relics hearkens to the ages past, when the earliest buildings that we call “churches,” were the shrines erected around the final resting places of Martyrs. Hence, these buildings were called “Μαρτύρια,” for they bore witness to the love and faith of those who willingly gave up their lives for Christ, following His own precious words:

Greater love has no one than this, to sacrifice your life for your friends. *

My friends: Martyrs do not die for a cause, or for an idea. They die for a person – the Divine Person of our Lord Jesus Christ. That is why we use their Relics to sanctify the Altars of our Churches. And that is why this evening we have brought three of the most famous Martyrs of our Church to be entombed unto eternity tomorrow in the sacred Service of Consecration. Think of it! From now on, your Eucharists will be celebrated atop their sacred bones, as in the days of our spiritual ancestors worshipping in catacombs. The three Saints who rest tonight upon the Altar and will be with you through the grace of their earthly remains are as follows:

Saint Panteleimon the Great Martyr and Healer, whom we celebrate on July 27th.

Saint Haralambos the Hieromartyr and Wonderworker, whom we extol on February 10th. In the case of Saint Haralambos, his disciples actually celebrated the Liturgy on his newly-reposed body after his martyrdom!

And Saint Barbara the Great Martyr, whom we will celebrate on December 4th.

As I said before, the association of churches where the Martyrs gave their lives found its first fulfillment in the “Μαρτύρια.” But you should all be aware – the most famous in the world is, of course, the Ἀνάστασις in Jerusalem, often called the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. Today, it contains not only the Empty Tomb of our Lord Jesus Christ, but the site of Golgotha as well, where He gave up His life for the life of the world.

The presence of the Saints in their relics is vivified by the Resurrected Lord of Glory. That is why the Eucharist that is consecrated atop the Altar, where their bones lie, is the glorified Flesh and Blood of our God.

Thus, my beloved Christians, we come to the understanding of why the Precious Relics of the Martyrs are buried within the Holy Table. To quote the Second Century writer Tertullian:

“The blood of the Martyrs is the seed of the Church.” †

Your Church, through the presence of these Holy Relics, realizes its potential as a living field of spiritual seeds. And you are the beneficiaries of

those seeds of faith in God, of hope of eternal life, and of love for one another. Every Sacrament, every Sunday School lesson, every community celebration, becomes an opportunity for growth and maturation.

Like the Precious Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ that we will receive tomorrow in the Divine Liturgy, the blood of these Holy Martyrs: Panteleimon, Haralambos and Barbara, will nourish your spiritual life, through their bodily presence within the Altar.

Remember these Martyred Saints, and their feastdays. For they join in the Chorus of Saint that is led by your Heavenly Patron, the Panagia whose own resurrection you celebrate every August Fifteenth.

They will keep you and protect you and your families. They are your intercessors before the Altar “Not-Made-With-Hands” – το Ἀχειροποίητον – that abides forever in Heaven.

Through their holy prayers, may you all enjoy the spiritual harvest that comes from the planting of this seed this weekend, and enjoy the fruits of faith, hope, and love here in your beloved Assumption parish, and throughout the Church.

Amen.

* John 15:13.

† Apologeticus, L.13.

Photos: Archdiocesan District

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