

13/10/2023

Archbishop Elpidophoros Exhortation to the Chicago Metropolis Clergy Laity Assembly



image not found or type unknown

His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros of America
Exhortation to the Chicago Metropolis Clergy Laity Assembly
October 12, 2023
Meridian Banquet & Conference Center
Rolling Meadows, Illinois

My Beloved Brother in Christ, Your Eminence Metropolitan Nathanael,
Dear Bishop Timotheos of Hexamilion, Chancellor of the Metropolis,
Interim President of the Clergy Syndesmos, Father Stephen Bithos,
First Vice President of the Metropolitan Council, Dean Avdalas,
President of the Metropolis Philoptochos, Marilyn Tzakis,
Very Reverend and Reverend Fathers,
Esteemed Archons of the Ecumenical Patriarchate,
Honored Members of Leadership 100,
Dear Sisters of the Metropolis Philoptochos,
Esteemed Delegates to the Clergy-Laity Assembly,
Dear Members of the Metropolis Junior Board,
Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

That ... is a long lead-in! But a worthy one for your Metropolis Clergy Laity Assembly, which is a marvelous example of the fullness – the pleroma, of the Church.

Before I begin my exhortation, though, I would like to briefly touch upon something that I know many of you are interested in – the status of the Mixed Commission on our Sacred Archdiocese’s Charter. Currently, the Holy and Sacred Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate is awaiting our Eparchial Synod’s consensus concerning its ongoing discussion on the general direction of the Charter. Once this has been achieved, we will then reconvene the Mixed Commission and carry on the work that has already begun. Therefore, please know that as we progress in our joint deliberations, we will be sure to apprise our Archdiocesan faithful accordingly of all relevant decisions.

Moving ahead now to today’s events, I would like to state how delighted I am to join all of you for these special days when you are gathered together as the Body of Christ. Your enthusiasm and dedication are most evident. And I am especially taken by the icon representation that you are using for this occasion.

In visualizing the Scriptural theme of this Assembly: “God, Who began a good work in you, will surely complete it...” you have accompanied it with an iconographic depiction of what I would call, “The Orthodox Christian Wheel of Life.” And this is no mere “Rota Fortunae,” that ancient conception of the world as a whirling wheel that shifts one’s fortunes by chance. Beautifully summed up by the great Shakespeare, who says through the mouth of a lamentable character: “Fortune, good night, smile once more; turn thy wheel!”*

No, my friends, the Orthodox Christian Wheel of Life does not cast us to the fates. Rather, it engages us to be responsible, accountable persons, and to fulfill our destiny. When the Lord washed the feet of His Disciples, and Peter – the one who was soon to deny Him – tried to forbid the Lord from doing so, our Savior replied to him:

Ἐὰν μὴ νίψω σε, οὐκ ἔχεις μέρος μετ’ ἐμοῦ.

“If I do not wash you, you have no destiny with me.” †

You see, my beloved Christians? The “good work” commenced in our lives by the Lord begins with our washing unto regeneration – at our Baptism. And as we continually receive from the Lord the washing of our lowest selves – symbolized by our feet – through repentance and confession, we affirm that our μέρος, our lot, our

part, our portion, and our entire destiny lies with the Lord of Glory.

Thus, your iconographic story of our Wheel of Life begins with our formation, over which the Lord presides, and unwinds from the center to reveal the whole panoply of creation. These are the “good works” that the Lord established at the beginning of time, when He looked upon all that He had made, and we read:

And God saw everything that He had made, and behold, it was very good. And the evening and the morning were the sixth day.‡

Indeed, my friends – we have been created, as the Scripture says, “very good.” And our destiny lies in pursuing the course of our lives – no matter how long or brief – in the sacred quest for meaning and participation in the life of Christ, which is the life of His Holy Church.

I was moved by the penultimate image of the Wheel, which shows us climbing a ladder to reach the summit where the Church and the Kingdom merge into one reality. For the Ladder of Divine Ascent is surely our means to achieve our ultimate goal. As the Holy John Climacus exhorts us all:

“Run, I beseech you, with him who said: : Let us hasten until we attain to the unity of faith and of the knowledge of God, unto a perfect person, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ Who, when He was baptized in His thirtieth year of His visible age, fulfilled the thirtieth step in the spiritual ladder; since God is indeed love....”§

Yes, we are called to climb the spiritual ladder that leads heavenward. And that ladder is the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, on which we traverse by carrying our own crosses, as He has enjoined us.

Thus, God will complete the work that He has called us to, and we will complete the journey upon which He has set our path.

This Clergy Laity Assembly is a place to check the milestones for your parishes and your Metropolis. It is a post where you can read the signs of your “progress in life, faith, and spiritual understanding.”**

You will learn from one another, and take back to your communities the inspiration and innovation that you have received here, trusting all the while that indeed, the “God, Who began a good work in you, will surely complete it.”

To Him be praise, dominion, power — in Whom is, and was, and will be, the cause of all goodness throughout endless ages. Amen. ††

* King Lear, Act II, Scene

† John 13:8.

‡ Genesis 1:31.

§ The Ladder of Divine Ascent, The Brief Exhortation Summarizing the Book.

** Second Prayer of the Faithful; Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom.

†† Concluding Doxology of the Brief Exhortation Summarizing the Book, The Ladder of Divine Ascent.

goarch.org