

30/10/2023

Homily by Archbishop Elpidophoros At the Divine Liturgy Ascension Greek Orthodox Cathedral Oakland, California



Your Eminence, and beloved brother, Metropolitan Gerasimos of San Francisco,

Your Eminences and Your Grace,

Reverend Clergy,

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

In the Book of Exodus, it says the following about the People of God, and their sojourn out of Egypt toward the Promised Land:

The sons of Israel ate the manna forty years, until they came to an inhabited land; they ate the manna until they came to the border of the land of Canaan.*

Today, my beloved Christians, we celebrate this Divine Liturgy, with a special intention for your Proïstamenos, the Reverend Protopresbyter Athanasios – or, as you lovingly call him, Father Tom.

For forty years, Father Tom has distributed the Manna of Heaven – the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ to the Israel of God – which is our Holy Orthodox Church.

For forty years, Father Tom has sojourned with his parishioners – from the Annunciation Church in Chattanooga, Tennessee, to the Ascension Cathedral here in Oakland and other parishes – guiding and shepherding the Flock of the Great Shepherd, our Lord Jesus Christ.

For forty years, hand in hand with Presvytera Julie and their children – one of whom is co-celebrating among us today, Father Christopher – Father Tom has ministered to the needs of the family of God, even as he has cared for his own family.

Today, we celebrate this journey – with his Metropolitan, our beloved brother in the Lord, His Eminence Gerasimos, whom we honored last evening. And we have with us Father Tom's lifelong friend, Metropolitan Savas of Pittsburgh, who made a special trip to be with us today. Together with the other hierarchs and clergy, we are gathered as one family in Christ, to recognize and express our appreciation and gratitude for his many years of selfless and dedicated service to Christ and His Holy Church.

In Israel of old, the manna that fell upon the ground was a faint image of the Eucharist that was to come, for, as the Scripture records:

...whoever gathered much had nothing left over, and whoever gathered little had no lack. †

This was a foreshadowing of the Most Precious Body of our Lord Jesus Christ, which, we affirm at the sacred moment when the Consecrated Bread is broken to be distributed:

The Lamb of God is ... ever eaten, yet never consumed; but sanctifying those who partake.

For the true Bread of Heaven is not the manna that fell in the wilderness. As the Lord Himself declared:

“Amen, amen, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the Bread of Heaven;

rather, it is My Father that gives you the true Bread of Heaven. For the Bread of God is the One Who descends from Heaven, granting life to the world.”‡

Bringing this “true Bread of Heaven” is the work, the “liturgy,” of every priest with his parish, so that all may be sanctified. Father Tom has been faithfully fulfilling this mission for forty years, to grace his faithful people with divine nourishment, and prepare them for the Kingdom of God.

It is also said that the manna was only provisional for the Israelites – until they should reach the Promised Land.

For us, who partake of the Divine Nature through the Holy Eucharist, it is much the same. Throughout our lives, we have so many opportunities to participate in the Divine Liturgy, and with preparation, to receive the Holy Body and Precious Blood of our Lord. But one day – and only God knows the hour and the day – the Lord shall return to claim His Bride, the Holy Church. And at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb, our Lord Jesus Christ will partake with us once again in the Eucharist, as He did say on the night in which He gave Himself up for the life of the world:

“Truly I tell you, I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when the Kingdom of God has come!” §

Then, my beloved Christians, we shall commence our eternal and new life with God in the New Jerusalem – a reality that can barely be imagined, yet is granted for us to behold in a visionary way, in the Book of Revelation, witnessed by the Evangelist John:

But I saw no temple in the City. For the Lord God Pantokrator and the Lamb are Her Temple. And the City had no need of either the sun or moon to shine, for the glory of God enlightens Her, and the Lamb is Her lamp. **

This, then, is our Promised Land! And with good shepherds like Father Tom, whose entire life has been dedicated to shepherding the sheep of Christ, feeding them and nurturing them, we shall all find our way to our Heavenly Home.

Through the grace and love toward humankind of the Only-Begotten Son of God, Who is blessed with His Eternal Father, and the All-Holy, Good, and Life-giving Spirit, now and forever, and unto the ages of ages.

Amen.

* Exodus 16:35.

† Exodus

‡ John 6:32-33.

§ Luke 22:18.

** Revelation 21:22-23.

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