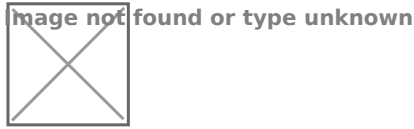


30/10/2023

Archbishop Elpidophoros Invocation, Remarks & Benediction at the Luncheon Celebrating the Forty Year Ministry of Protopresbyter Athanasios (Tom) Zaferes Oakland, California



Let us pray to the Lord.

Lord have mercy.

Lord Jesus Christ our God, You ascended into Glory to seat us all in the heavenly places* – we give You thanks this day for the ministry and journey of Protopresbyter Athanasios and his family. Bless them and this Ascension Cathedral whom they serve, so that in the true light of Your Countenance, they may live and proceed from glory to glory.

Bless also this gathering, the food and drink that nourish our bodies, and bless the hands of all those who made preparation for our necessities. Grant unto all who gather in this Agape Feast of love and gratitude, and to all their loved ones, that they may know the fullness of Your Divine Presence within their hearts, their minds, and their very souls.

For unto You do we ascribe all honor, glory and worship, together with Your Eternal Father, and Your All-Holy, Good, and Life-creating Spirit: now and ever, and unto the ages of ages.

Amen.

Your Eminence, Beloved Brother Metropolitan Gerasimos,

Your Eminences and Your Grace,

Beloved and Reverend Clergy,

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Beloved Father Tom, Presvytera Julie, and your wonderful Family,

We have now come from the Divine Liturgy commemorating the Forty-Year ministry of Father Tom, to this Agape Feast – a fellowship meal of unity and solidarity. We embrace one another with ἀγάπη, that special love that our Lord Jesus Christ inspires in our hearts and minds.

And we share in a meal as well, which nourishes our bodies, is an extra benefit. From the Bread of Heaven to the Bread of Earth. We gather in these “Agape Feasts” in our Church communities, not because we are hungry (though some of the young ones might be!). The real purpose is the opportunity to look into one another’s eyes, to smile at your fellow parishioners and friends, and to remind us all that we are one family in Christ.

Last evening we shared an Agape Feast for our beloved brother, Metropolitan Gerasimos. Today, we gather for our brother, Father Tom. The love that was pouring forth last night continues to spill over into this sweet assembly, filled with every manner of the members of the Body of Christ.

I was so delighted to listen to the greetings conveyed by Their Eminences Gerasimos and Savas, who have expressed the sentiments of all. The gifts, the declarations of affection and respect. Everyone is honoring each other through the honoring of Father Tom, Presvytera Julie (who has been at his side all along), and his family.

It is a gift that keeps circling the community, reminding me of that story of the grapes that were sent to the great Abba Makarios because he was fond of them, but he demurred and sent them along to another brother who was sick. And that brother sent them on to someone else out of his charity, and on and on it went, until the grapes finally made their way back to Makarios, and they were still as fresh and delectable as ever.

You see, my friends, the fruit of love is never exhausted. It passes through a community and refreshes every person it touches in the heart. The manifestations of love and appreciation we are witnessing today surely are renewing your community, even as they pay tribute to Father Tom.

To you, dear Father, I say the following: Look around and behold the fruits of your ministry! This cornucopia of friendship and admiration is the result of your ministry, which by God’s grace, has yielded a harvest even to a hundredfold. Rejoice in this spiritual yield. Allow it to replenish your spirit, and persevere in your service to

Christ and His Holy Church.

You will remember this day for many years to come, and your ministry will achieve even greater things, for the glory of God and His Holy Name.

May the Lord bless you all!

Let us pray to the Lord.

Lord have mercy.

We give thanks to You, O Christ our God, for You have fed us with the bread of this good earth for our bodies, and You perfect us with the Bread of Heaven unto eternal life. Multiply the benefits of this meal throughout the world, as You multiplied the five loaves and two fishes in the wilderness, and brought forth twelve baskets full.

And as You grant us to always be mindful of the needs of others, we humbly beseech You:

Make Your face to shine upon us and be gracious unto us.

Lift up the light of Your countenance upon us and give us peace,

Now and ever, and unto ages of ages.

Amen.

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