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## **Archbishop Elpidophoros of America Homily at the Divine Liturgy Archdiocese Presbyters Council Clergy Retreat Phoenix, AZ**



Your Eminence[s] and Grace[s],

Beloved Brothers in Christ,

Today, we celebrate seven illustrious bishops, who were members of the larger group of Seventy Disciples of the Lord, recorded in the Gospel of Saint Luke.\*

Apelles, Bishop of Heraclea;

Amplias, Bishop of Odysopolis;

Urban, Bishop of Macedonia;

Narcissus, Bishop of Athens;

Aristobulus, Bishop of Britain;

and most significantly for us, as sons of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, Stachys of the Church of Byzantium, which we know as the Queen of Cities, Constantinople. For those of you who have visited the Mother Church at the Phanar, you know this Saint from the magnificent mosaic icon that is on the left, as you enter the main building.

You see the Apostle and First-Called Disciple Saint Andrew handing the Book of the Gospels to this Apostle Stachys. The image conveys both the spiritual lineage of Saint Stachys and his Apostolic appointment and ordination to the episcopacy. The Holy Apostle Paul calls him, “Στάχυν τὸν ἀγαπητόν μου,” in his Epistle to the Romans, showing the engaged ministry of this first Bishop of what would become the City of Constantine.†

As we all know, the Great Church of Christ was founded as an Apostolic Church by Saint Andrew – like Rome, Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem. This is the beginning of what we know as the “Pentarchy,” which, for the last thousand years, has only the four remaining Πρεσβυγενή Πατριαρχεία, led by the Ecumenical Patriarchate. It is through Saint Stachys the Apostle, that this Apostolic line continues and reaches us right down to this very day.

We celebrate the Synaxis of all the Seventy Apostles on January Fourth during the Fore-feast of the Holy Theophany. These Seventy are a mirror image of the Seventy Translators of the Septuagint, who lived hundreds of years before them. Through God’s providence, the Old Testament was placed into the lingua franca of the Mediterranean World, so that in the “fullness of time,”‡ it could be transmitted to the Gentile Converts of that world, by these very same Apostles whose “sound went forth into all the oikoumene, and their words unto the uttermost parts of the earth.” §

The name, “Stachys,” means “head of grain,” and can also mean “progeny.” Both meanings accord with the Apostle, because he was both the spiritual son and successor of Saint Andrew, and an abundant yield of souls – even to “a hundredfold,”\*\* The agricultural reference would have resonated powerfully in the Mediterranean world of the First Century. Consider this wonderful reference in the Gospel of Matthew:

Ἐν ἐκείνῳ τῷ καιρῷ ἐπορεύθη ὁ Ἰησοῦς τοῖς σάββασι διὰ τῶν σπορίμων· οἱ δὲ

μαθηταὶ αὐτοῦ ἐπείνασαν, καὶ ἤρξαντο τίλλειν στάχυας καὶ ἐσθίειν.

At that time, Jesus was walking through the wheat-fields on the Sabbath, and His disciples were hungry and began to pluck and eat the heads of grain. ††

Such heads of grain are an image of the nourishment of the Teaching Bread of Heaven, taken into the mouths of the Disciples, from whose same mouths the Gospel was then preached. There is a sense here of transmutation, from words in our hearing, to words from our hearts.

Stachys is our spiritual progenitor, who represents both the origin of our spiritual lineage, and the purpose of that holy ancestry. We, who are the descendants of the Apostolic Mission to Byzantium, and are the Children of the Mother Church of Constantinople, are the inheritors of Her great harvest of theologians, saints, ascetics, martyrs and Hierarchs.

But we are also called to be those who bring forth our own harvests, to nourish the generations to come. As Bishops, Priests, and Deacons, we are to sow the Word of God and reap yields for the Kingdom – thirty, sixty, and even a hundredfold, as did Saint Stachys.

Our work in these days of our Retreat is to clarify our sense of ministry; to make sure that we have not forgotten our first and chief love – the planting of the Lord. ††

Therefore, let us cultivate within our hearts and minds the “heads of grain,” that we consume. Let us apply ourselves to the λόγοι τοῦ Λόγου, and thus, with our ministries empowered and enriched, by the intercessions of the Apostle Stachys, we can fulfill the ingathering of the Faithful, so beautifully described in the Teaching of the Twelve Apostles:

Even as this broken bread was scattered over the hills, and was gathered together and became one, so let Your Church be gathered together from the ends of the earth into Your kingdom; for Yours is the glory and the power through Jesus Christ forever. §§

\* Luke 10:1.

† Romans 16:9.

‡ Galatians 4:4.

§ Psalm 18:4 (LXX).

\*\* Cf. Luke 8:8.

†† Matthew 12:1.

‡‡ Cf. Isaiah 61:3.

§§ Didache, chapter 9.

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