

04/12/2023

# **GREETING By His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros of America At the Golden Anniversary of the Greek Orthodox Church of Saint Theodore in Lanham, Maryland**



Protopresbyter Emmanuel of this wonderful Parish,

Parish Council President Nick Michaelides,

Golden Anniversary and Banquet Co-Chairs,

Beloved Philoptochos, and Parish Organization Heads,

Golden Jubilee Sponsors, Archons, and Members of Leadership 100,

Beloved Sisters and Brothers in the Lord:

What a wonderful occasion to be with you – for this Golden Anniversary. Fifty Years! Truly, a worthy occasion for celebration. If you will allow the expression, it is a “pentecostal” moment for your parish, for we know that Πεντηκοστή means “Fifty.”

In the liturgical life of our Church, as in the Old Testament, the Feast of Pentecost comes exactly fifty days after Pascha. Under the Old Covenant, we read in the Book of Exodus that this is the date when, fifty days after passing through the Red Sea upon dry land, Moses received the Law on Mount Sinai. Under the New Covenant, we read in the Book of Acts that on this day, fifty days after Pascha, the Disciples received the Holy Spirit.

In the former instance, the newly liberated Hebrews received the moral and ethical code that would define them as People of God. In the latter, the Disciples received the “promise of the Father,” the fullness of the Holy Spirit.[\*]

And tonight, for your wonderful community dedicated to Saint Theodore Stratelates, we observe with much joy and gladness the Fiftieth Year since your founding. You hold both of these meanings of Pentecost within this jubilee of celebration and praise. For you have lived your life as a community of believers in

the light of God's commandments. And through the Holy Mysteries of the Church, you have received the grace of the Holy Spirit for all these decades.

As we pause to take stock of this sacred moment in your journey as a Parish, we remember those who came before us; their names ring out with honor and grace. The ever-memorable Archbishop Iakovos; the late and blessed Metropolitan Silas; and the many priests and dedicated laymen and laywomen who sacrificed to bring this Parish to the marvelous place that it is today.

And there are still among you those who remember the early days, when the desire to hold on to the legacy of culture and language, inspired the creation of a Greek School. And from there, it was only a few steps to bringing the fullness of community life by becoming a parish of our Sacred Archdiocese.

A lot of love and sacrifice has brought this very special community to the success and achievements of which you should all be very proud. Yet, within the passage of these five decades – now gone in the blink of an eye – is included a moment of reflection on where your parish is going.

The glorious history of the pioneer Greeks of America will never be forgotten, precisely because of the future that you are building. The fact is that you, like every other community in America, stand on the shoulders of these giants. And now, at this important milestone for the community, you have the opportunity to give due consideration to your future.

As I said before, the number, "Fifty," has one meaning in Exodus and another in the Book of Acts, but they both speak to accomplishing the will and work of God. In Moses receiving the Law of God – the Ten Commandments – we see the practice of ethical and moral behavior. In the Holy Spirit descending upon the Disciples in tongues of fire, we see the inner transformation of the human person to become a channel of divine love in the world. The former inspires conformity, and the latter sparks transformation. Both are necessary. Both are the work of this Parish.

That is why, as you look to your next fifty years, I want you to consider this golden anniversary of your beautiful Church as a starting point. The churches in which we worship are containers for the corporate and liturgical life of the Church. But even the most sumptuous treasure chest is not more precious than the individual jewels that it holds.

You, my beloved people, are the jewels of the Church. You each have different facets. Some are larger; some are smaller; some are more polished than others. But all of you shine with the Spirit of God. All of you are of inestimable value, for

you are each the unique image of God.

In the next fifty years, let us see how this marvelous Community can promote every person's distinctiveness, their special qualities that bring to the fullness of the Church even more light and radiance.

You are led by the great General Saint Theodore! Follow him on the path of faith, righteousness and bravery. You will never be disappointed by him, for he is the true icon of courage.

Through his holy prayers may this jubilee be an auspicious beginning for even greater heights.

Thank you for your fidelity to our Church. Here is to the next fifty years!

Photos: Chaz Brown

[\*] Cf. Luke 24:49.

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