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HOMILY By His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros of America At the Golden Jubilee Saint Theodore Greek Orthodox Church



Beloved sisters and brothers in the Lord,

Today, we celebrate your Jubilee of fifty years! Yesterday, we gathered in an Agape Feast of love and appreciation – to remember those who came before us, and to contemplate what the future will bring.

But now, we must look at the essence of what a Jubilee of fifty years truly means, and we find that meaning in the Old Testament, in the Book of Leviticus. The English word “Jubilee” means the sound of a ram’s horn, which was used to announce the Fiftieth Year.

In Greek, the word “Jubilee” is “ἀφέσεως σημασία,” which means, a “sign of forgiveness.” As it says in Scripture:

Καὶ ἀγιάσετε τὸ ἔτος τὸ πεντηκοστὸν ἑνιαυτὸν καὶ διαβοήσετε ἄφεσιν ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς τοῖς κατοικοῦσιν αὐτήν· ἑνιαυτὸς ἀφέσεως σημασία αὕτη ἔσται ὑμῖν....

And you shall sanctify the fiftieth year, and you shall proclaim forgiveness

throughout the land to its inhabitants; it shall be a Jubilee – a sign of forgiveness to you....[*]

My beloved Christians: is this not an extraordinary invitation? You are so very blessed to be living at this sacred moment – when the Fiftieth Year of your wonderful Parish of Saint Theodore Stratelates has come to pass. Your Heavenly General has led you to this time, when the blessings of the Jubilee Year are at your fingertips.

And what are these blessings? They are an opportunity to shed the burdens of your hearts, your minds, and your very souls. For the Jubilee was God’s way of restoring balance to the world. It was a time when slaves would be freed. A time when debts would be forgiven. And a time when all persons would return to their own homes.

So, what does this sign of forgiveness mean for you here at Saint Theodore?

First, this is a moment when God calls you to live in the freedom that His grace can grant you. So often in our lives, we enslave ourselves to the attachment of worldly things, ambitions, careers, and even relationships. This Jubilee – this Golden Anniversary of your Parish – is an opening for each of you to reassess the priorities of your lives. You can step out in faith, protected and shielded by your Celestial Patron Saint, and shed the attachments to the things of this world that are holding you back. And you can go one step further.

You can grant freedom – forgiveness of sins – to those who have injured you; whether emotionally, materially, or even physically. Forgiveness is the ultimate liberation; for it is how God redeems us.

Every time we pray the Lord’s prayer we say:

“καὶ ἄφες ἡμῖν τὰ ὀφειλήματα ἡμῶν, ὡς καὶ ἡμεῖς ἀφίεμεν τοῖς ὀφειλέταις ἡμῶν....”

This is usually rendered and recited as:

“and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us....”

But we should remember that the Greek original, ὀφείλημα, means, “that which is owed” – a debt.

Therefore, in your year of Jubilee, forgive the debts of others toward you. Whether they are emotional, material or spiritual. You will feel more free within your hearts, because you will sense God's forgiveness of your debts, even as you forgive your debtors.

Finally, beloved my brothers and sisters, a Jubilee is a time to return home. And by this, I mean your spiritual home, the Greek Orthodox Church, right here at Saint Theodore. We often wander away from the Church - at least in our minds and hearts. But in this Jubilee, God is calling us home. The Jewish People blew the shofar - the ram's horn - to signify the Fiftieth Year. You are now hearing the call of the trumpet of your Holy General Theodore. He is calling you home to your faith, to your community, and to your Church family.

And so, may you always heed that call, and find yourselves enveloped in the love of God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; Who is praised and glorified forever and ever. Amen.

Photos: Chaz Brown

[*] Leviticus 25:10a.

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