

06/12/2023

Homily By Archbishop Elpidophoros of America At the Vespers of the Feast of Saint Nicholas the Wonderworker Saint Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church & National Shrine



Beloved brothers and sisters in Christ,

Tonight, we come together as the People of God, to celebrate the Victory of the People: Νικόλαος! Whom we praise as:

Ἱεραρχῶν τὴν καλλονὴν, καὶ τῶν Πατέρων κλέος, τὴν βρύσιν τῶν θαυμάτων, καὶ τῶν πιστῶν ἀντιλήπτορα μέγιστον....

The adornment of hierarchs, the glory of the Fathers, the well-spring of miracles and great defender of the faithful....*

Here at this Hallowed Ground Zero, we have raised up this church in the name of the Wonderworker of Myra, and in memory of all those who perished those many years ago on September Eleventh.

Moreover, we honor all those whose lives were sacrificed in the aftermath, by the illnesses and sorrow that ensued, after that terrible day in the history of our country and of the world.

As we look around this shining jewel box of a church, we see the life of the Saint portrayed in a ring of images. We behold him in a full cycle of his life, from his nativity to his dormition. We see:

The Birth of Saint Nicholas;

The Ordination of Saint Nicholas to the Episcopacy;

Saint Nicholas Appearing in a Dream to the Eparch Ablabios and the Saintly Emperor Constantine;

Saint Nicholas Rescuing Three Innocent Men from execution;

Saint Nicholas and the Dowry for the Three Maidens;

The Sea Miracle;

And finally, the Dormition (Koimesis) of Saint Nicholas.

In all of his Holy Icons, in the services that invoke his name, in the prayers that we offer in our churches – we enjoy the presence of the Holy Wonderworker, by grace, which is the Divine Energy of God.

But here at his National Shrine, we rejoice not only in his hypostatic presence through these icons; we also have the precious and sacred relic of his holy hand, gifted from the Holy Mountain and bestowed upon us by our Ecumenical Patriarch. The superabundance of these blessings of the images and the Precious Relics of the Saint are an important message for our communities and society as a whole. And it is this: νίκη τοῦ λαοῦ, victory of the people – whether it is of one human being or of every human being – that is not found in conquering others. It is found in conquering oneself.

This is the true victory in Christ, because it is only as we conquer our passions, our sinful inclinations, and our selfish desires, that we are able to represent the will of God in our lives. Just as Saint Nicholas did, and so he is rightfully praised.

We call him, ἱεραρχῶν τὴν καλλονήν, an “adornment” of Hierarchs. Why? Because his archpastoral ministry in Myra imitated the Great Shepherd of the rational sheep, our Lord Jesus Christ. Saint Nicholas cared for every member of his flock, and he saved them from dangers near and far.

We also name him, τῶν Πατέρων κλέος, the “glory” of the Fathers. Why? Because, as I am sure you all know, he struggled mightily against heresy at the First Ecumenical Council, and he championed the Orthodox Dogma of the Holy Trinity. Even at great personal cost, when he was arrested and imprisoned for challenging the Arch-Heretic Arius.

But God miraculously intervened, and thus showed the beginning of the ministry of Saint Nicholas as a “well-spring of miracles” – τὴν βρύσιν τῶν θαυμάτων – as the Doxastikon sings. And because of this miraculous ministry, he is “the great defender of the faithful.”

My beloved Christians,

Your Heavenly Patron is a powerful intercessor before God. Let us understand that God still works miracles in his Holy Ones, and particularly through the Holy Hierarch and Wonderworker Nicholas.

May we always have his prayers as we struggle to be victors through Christ in our lives on earth, and may we have his intercessions when we stand before the dread Judgment Seat of Christ, as did all those who perished so unjustly on 9/11. Thus, we will be welcomed into the mansions of eternity, to live in the Kingdom of God. Amen.

* Doxastikon of the Kekragarion of the Great Vespers of Saint Nicholas.

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