

08/12/2023

Homily by Archbishop Elpidophoros of America At the Divine Liturgy on the Feast of Saint Nicholas the Wonderworker Saint Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church & National Shrine



Beloved sisters and brothers in Christ,

Every time I come here to Ground Zero, and I pause to meditate on the sorrowful and tragic events that unfolded here on September 11, 2001, I look at this shining American Parthenon of Orthodoxy, and I give thanks for our prayerful, loving and compassionate presence.

It is such a privilege for us to be here – to incarnate the Greek Orthodox Faith in this place of remembrance and honor. The glimmering marble that radiates within and without, calls to mind its older sister, the Parthenon of Athens. And yet, this church of love and memory glows with its own power and glory.

We are surrounded by a vision of Heaven, by the magnificent acts of God for our salvation, by the story of Saint Nicholas, and by the history of this Hallowed Ground. For here – in the midst of hateful acts of death and devastation – courage, devotion to duty, and, above all else, love for one’s fellow human being, manifested on that dark day of destruction.

It should be no wonder that this National Shrine shines both day and night; for the light of true humanity glowed brilliantly in the hearts of the many heroes of that day who sacrificed themselves for the sake of others.

Truly, this is the “victory of the people,” the literal meaning of “Nicholas.” In the face of certain death, bravery overcame. As is inscribed on the exterior corner of this Shrine:

“Greater love has no one than this, to sacrifice your life for your friends.”*

And that is what the Saint Nicholas National Shrine is all about – the “greater love” that was shown on September Eleventh in the days, months and years that

followed.

Our witness here at the rebuilt World Trade Center – which shall forever be remembered as our National “Ground Zero” – must be one of love and compassion for every soul that passes through into these sacred precincts. Whether it is from the desire to be still and sit in tranquility, or to say a prayer and light a candle, or simply out of curiosity as why a Church building rises in Liberty Park, we are here to welcome every person who comes within these magnificent walls.

There is a ministry in this place that no other Orthodox Church in our Nation can even approximate. For this Church is more than just a Parish that serves a surrounding community.

It is a sacred place, set in a spiritual landscape that has profound meaning for the American People and for the world. It is truly an “ecumenical” presence, in the sense that it embraces all persons of the inhabited world – the oikoumene – to which the Lord called us to preach the Gospel.

On this feast of our Heavenly Patron, the Wonderworker of Myra, let us embrace with all our hearts and minds the very special mission of our Shrine for the Nation. Let us extend hands of friendship across every chasm of alienation.

Where there is pain, let us bring healing.

Where there is sorrow, let us bring comfort.

Where there is enmity, let us bring understanding.

Where there is grievance, let us bring forgiveness.

Where there is suffering, let us bring compassion.

And where there is hatred, let us bring love.

Our National Shrine is much more than a rebuilt Church. And our place at Ground Zero is much more than a place of entitlement.

Many, many people worked for years to ensure that we had a place at the table, so to speak. The funding of this extraordinary endeavor was a miracle in itself.

Now, inspired by Saint Nicholas himself, let us give back to our Country and to the world a vision for a better tomorrow and for a hope-filled future.

Let us be prayerful intercessors before the Throne of God, even as the Saint is. Like

our Panagia, he is “sleepless in his intercession†” and watches over us. Let us take up the watches with him, and be the godly and reverent example that we are called to be.

Therefore, as we embrace this Season of Christmas, may the powerful intercessions of Saint Nicholas the Wonderworker always keep us, our families, and this precious parish and National Shrine in his loving care and presence.

May God grant unto all of you good health and strength, so that you may serve our National Shrine and the Parish of the Holy Wonderworker of Myra with much honor, pride and prudence, and with the wisdom that surpasses all understanding. Amen.

* John 15:13.

† Cf. Kontakion of the Dormition.

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