

13/12/2023

## **Homily by Archbishop Elpidophoros of America At the Great Vespers of Saint Spyridon the Wonderworker Saint Spyridon Greek Orthodox Church**



Beloved brothers and sisters in Christ,

What a joy to return to this magnificent church in Washington Heights to celebrate with you – the faithful of Saint Spyridon – the feast of your heavenly Patron and Protector.

The Bishop, whom we commemorate this day, was above all else a shepherd to his flock. In fact, he was a working shepherd of sheep – here is a story about him from the Ecclesiastical History of Socrates Scholasticus:

So great was Spyridon's holiness, that while a shepherd, he was thought worthy of being made an Archpastor of men. He was made Bishop of one of the cities in Cyprus named Trymithous. Yet, on account of his extreme humility, he continued to care for his flocks while serving as Bishop.

One day, in the midnight hour, some thieves entered his sheepfold clandestinely, and attempted to carry off some of the sheep. But God, Who protected his

shepherd, preserved his sheep as well; for the thieves were bound by an invisible power to the folds.

At daybreak, when Spyridon came to the sheep and found the men with their hands tied behind them, he understood what had happened; and after having prayed, he liberated the thieves, earnestly admonishing and exhorting them to support themselves by honest labor, and not to take anything unjustly. He then gave them a ram, and sent them away, humorously adding, "that you may not appear to have watched all night in vain."\*

Such a shepherd was your patronal Saint, the great Spyridon. Even the thieves received his mercy and compassion. Because that is what the Good Shepherd, our Lord Jesus Christ, does. And all of us who are called to be bishops of the Church look to exemplars like Saint Spyridon to inspire our own ministries.

His continuing care for the irrational sheep of the pastures is a model for every Hierarch who is given responsibility for the rational Sheep of the Church.

Some of you may already know this, but the earliest images - icons - of our Lord are of a young and beardless shepherd, carrying on his shoulders a sheep. This image was very familiar because of the statues of the Kriophoros, the "Ram-bearer," and the Moschophoros, the "Calf-bearer," which were ubiquitous in the ancient Mediterranean world.

All of these images recall the words of the Lord Jesus Christ:

"Is there anyone among you with a hundred sheep - and if you lost one of them, would you not leave the ninety nine in the wilderness and go off after the lost sheep until you found it? And when you found that sheep, you would be so full of joy, that you would put it on your shoulders and come home with it, calling together your friends and neighbors and saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost!'"†

This is the meaning of the omophorion that every Bishop wears in the Divine Liturgy. It represents the lost sheep that we are called to seek and to find as would the Good Shepherd Himself, or our beloved Saint Spyridon.

I pray that I will always be worthy of the mantle of a shepherd that our wonderful Wonderworker exemplified, and I congratulate you all on this blessed feast of your Heavenly Patron.

Through the prayers of the Wonderworker and Great Father of Church, the Holy

Spyridon, may we all be blessed to arrive to Christmas, the New Year, and the Holy Epiphany, in good health and spiritual prosperity, and in the mercy, faith, and love of God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, now and forever. Amen.

\* Eccl. Hist. Bk. 1, Ch. 12.

† Luke 15:4-6.

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