

14/12/2023

General Counsel of the Archdiocese George Tsougarakis Hellene of the Year Speech



Father, thank you for those kind words and thank you to the Hellenic Medical Society for giving me this great honor. It is such a privilege to share this evening with two amazing physicians Dr. Ourania Preventza, and Dr. Marinos Petratos. Doctors, I salute you and congratulate you both. To be named Hellene of the Year is a distinction that humbles me beyond words. To even be considered alongside of the two of you is a privilege I do not take lightly. Life will sometimes give you perfect moments, moments when you can feel love and appreciation while being surrounded by family, friends and gifted colleagues. I think Doctors you can both agree with me that this is one of those perfect moments and for that the three thank all of you here tonight.

But as happy as I am receive this award, I feel compelled to address the elephant in the room which I know many of you are thinking. "Why Him??" I know that you are thinking this because in the time since the invitation went out, many people came up to me and asked "Why You?" Sometimes people were a little less blunt, like asking whether there was a different George Tsougarakis who was being honored, or trying to justify it by saying well since the event is on December 9th, that the Hellene of the year award is only good for three more weeks.

I heard all these things in the past few weeks, and I have to admit, they have a point. I am not worthy of being Hellene of the Year. I am more of an accidental Hellene, like the Forest Gump of Hellenes. I have been blessed to be in the right place at the right time, surrounded by true Hellenes, and it is through these people that I absorbed the spirit of Hellenism.

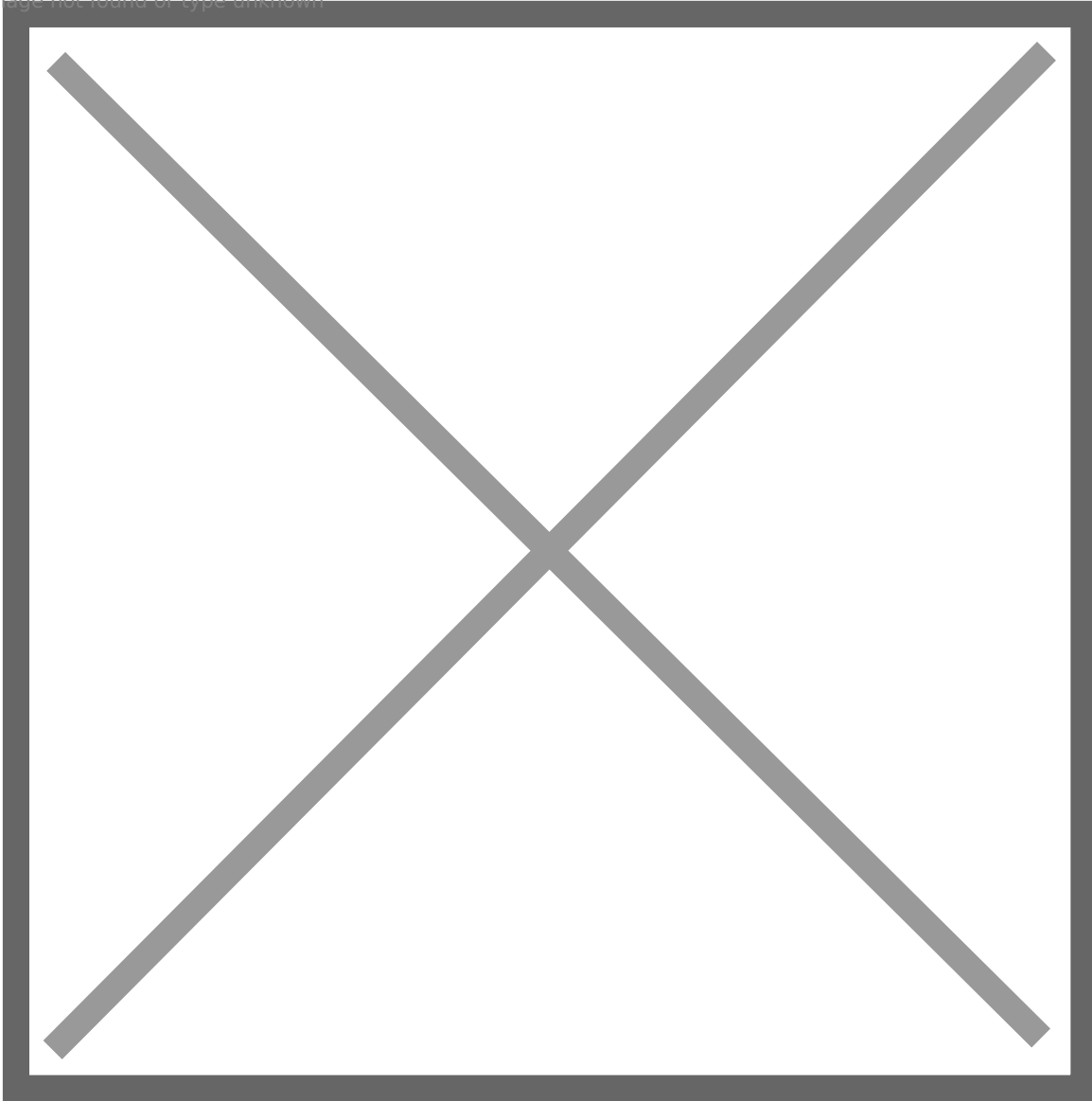
For example, I was raised by parents who thought that we all hit the lottery because we were born Greek. No matter what happened to us, how much better the neighbors did than us, my father would say "it's ok, they're not Greek". My parents believed all of the Greeks were superior and so we only did business with Greeks. Greek doctors, of course, but also Greek lawyers, landscapers, butchers, even Greek accountants. My parents were committed.

And then I met another Hellene, my wife Eva Poneros. God truly blessed me with this beautiful woman who was raised by parents who instilled in their children the ideals of Hellenism. My in-laws restored their family home in Greece not because they needed another home, but because it was a connection with their patria and as a result my wife carried with her the spirit of Hellenism from a very young age. I will stop short of saying that the only reason she married me was because I was Greek, but then again I am hard pressed to think of any other reason why she would choose me. It was my wife who then raised two Hellenes, Kira and Andoni. It was Eva who would leave work every Tuesday and Thursday to make sure the kids got to Greek School, and we are both proud that these amazing young people we call our children will carry Hellenism into the next generation. And I was blessed to be part of a wonderful community of Hellenes at the Metropolitan Cathedral of St. John the Theologian, many of whom are here tonight. Thank you.

All of these Hellenes throughout my life have influenced me, but there has been no greater impact than these past four years that I have served the Archdiocese as its general counsel. In that capacity I have worked shoulder to shoulder with people whose job it is to protect orthodoxy and Hellenism. People like John Catsimatidis, Elaine Allen, His Grace Bishop Athenagoras, Father Nektarios, Father Alex Karloutsos, and the list goes on and on. The Archdiocese is where I observed true Hellenism in action and of course, it is all in service of our beloved Archbishop Elpidophoros. I've had a front row seat to the Archbishop's life for these past 4 years and it is without exaggeration when I tell you that the future of Hellenism in this country is in his hands. His Eminence wakes up every day thinking only about our Greek Orthodox faith which is inextricably tied with our Hellenic ideals. In his short time as our Archbishop he has added immensely to the rich tapestry of Hellenic culture in this country. Remember, Hellenism is not just an empty idea, it's

a call to serve, to serve and uplift our community. If you care about Hellenism if you want to preserve and advance our Hellenic traditions, to nurture the bonds that tie us together, and to inspire future generations to embrace their heritage with pride, then I urge you to follow and support our Archbishop. He is the answer and Together with him, oloi mazi, let us continue to write the story of our Hellenic heritage with passion, purpose, and unwavering dedication. ZHTO H Ellas.

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