

15/12/2023

Remarks from Rewan Alrabadi, Parish Council Member of St. George Greek Orthodox Church Yonkers, NY



I'd like to start off with this verse Isaiah 41:10: "Don't be afraid, for I am with you. Don't be discouraged for I am your God. I will strengthen and help you. I will hold you up with my victorious right hand."

Our most honorable Archbishop Elpidophoros,

On behalf of the St. George Greek Orthodox Church parish, we would like to start off by saying thank you for your presence here today. On December 12th, 2023, at around 3 a.m. the whole trajectory of the future of our church changed forever. When we were informed of the terrible news about what had happened to the building part of our church, there was only one word to describe the feeling: devastation. As we all gathered after the fire and we saw the vulnerability, tears, and sadness of our parish, we knew this would be a day we would never forget. As questions, news reporters, whispers of onlookers and the sirens from the police and the fire department filled the air around us, we knew that moment called for one thing: prayer. As we thank Father Elias, Father George, and Father Soteri for their support and how they led us in prayer during the early hours of the morning, that prayer is replaying in our minds as it is what started the path of healing as a community. The verse I started off with resonates with as a parish because we must take hold of the word of God and refuse to let go especially during difficult times. One thing to always remember: God will never fail us nor forsake us, and with him first in each and every one of our lives, we will prosper. God is our refuge and source of our strength, and ever present help in trouble. As we endured many obstacles and setbacks throughout the establishment of our church, we remembered each step we took together and we thank God for allowing us to reach this point. When they say "there is beauty in simplicity", this is evident to us as we prayed in a simple enclosed space just to keep our faith alive. It is unfortunate to see that the space we prayed in as we awaited renovations and completion of our

church upstairs, was all gone due to this fire. As it feels we have to start over, we have to look on the brightside that we did not lose any lives, everything is replaceable and the most important thing in my eyes, as Father Soteri said, "not one bit of smoke reached our church that we worked so hard on". For those who have spent hours on end in that building, for those who prayed every Sunday there, for those who have devoted their time and support and most importantly for those who helped make all of this possible and believed in our parish, your contributions are noticed and we thank you as well. Despite this devastation, when something brings a community together and most importantly closer to God, this is a blessing in disguise. As many of you know, the only things that survived the fire was the cross on the top of our altar and an icon of our patron Saint George. The icon was untouched. The cross was floating with the water that put out the flames and is made of wood, so to the ordinary person it was bound to burn with the flames surrounding it. Two of the most important things to us as Orthodox Christians, a cross and an icon of the Saint we represent as a church put up a fight and overcame those flames. This is how I think of our parish. As we endure these difficult times, we have to keep our faith strong, and not let the enemy win against us. We thank you for your unwavering support and we ask you to keep us in your prayers. Your presence here today means more than anything to us in a time like this. We also want to take the time to thank Father Elias and his amazing parish for welcoming us with open arms to continue our prayer services on Sunday's in their church. God is with us and we are thankful for every trial he gives us. He gives the ones who love him most, the biggest obstacles. Thank you.

Photos: GOARCH/Dimitrios Panagos

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