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## Archbishop Elpidophoros of America Remarks at the Tarpon Springs Blessing of the Fleet January 5, 2024



Beloved Co-Celebrants in the Holy Spirit, Archbishop Niketas, Metropolitan Alexios, and Bishop Sebastian,

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

We commence the holy celebrations of the Great Feast of the Epiphany of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ with this blessing of the Fleet at these ever-memorable Sponge Docks. It is a moment when the waters of the Agiasmos - the Blessing of the Waters - presage all that is to come.

For in blessing these boats, and remembering all those who came before us - especially those sponge divers who lost their lives in the pursuit of their extraordinary work - we recapitulate in our minds and hearts the very essence of the Church, which is so wondrously, and so marvelously, experienced here in Tarpon Springs.

For the Church is the new Ark of Salvation, sailing upon the ocean of time, on its sacred voyage to eternity. We bless the waters and the ships - for the same Holy

Spirit that hovered upon the waters at the creation of the visible world, also returned to the ark of Noah as a dove with the olive branch in its beak, signifying the end of the Flood.

Both of these images remind us how intertwined water and wood are in the story of our salvation, especially τὸ ξύλον τοῦ Σταυροῦ. The Holy Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ is the mast upon which the sail of Holy Scripture unfurls, so that the Ark of the Church will be blown where the Spirit wills, even as the Lord said.\*

And perhaps no people has ever moved through water upon wooden ships as have the Greeks. Not only to defend their lands, but to disseminate their civilization, from the Black Sea to the Pillars of Hercules.

The fleet that we bless today with Holy Water reminds us all of these sacred connections. And the Tarpon Springs community shines with the light of Orthodoxy and of Greece in your souls, and indeed, with the memory of the islands from which your ancestors came.

Therefore, in blessing these boats today, and praying for the eternal repose of those who sailed among them, we initiate the greater Feast of Lights - Τά Ἅγια Φῶτα - the Holy Theophany of our Triune God.

May the Holy Trinity - the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit - always protect these ships and those who journey in them; bringing them safely home to port, through the powerful intercessions of the Holy Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary, and our father among the Saints, the Wonderworking Archbishop Nicholas of Myra in Lycia.

Amen!

\* Cf. John 3:8.

Photo: GOARCH/Dimitrios Panagos

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