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Homily By Archbishop Elpidophoros of America Metropolis of Atlanta Hellenic Dance Festival January 14, 2024



Reverend Clergy,

Beloved Children in the Lord,

What a joy it is for me to join all of you for the Hellenic Dance Festival of the Holy Metropolis of Atlanta. These cultural celebrations that take place across the Archdiocese are especially rewarding to see, because they bring so many of you – or young people – together in fellowship.

The fellowship of the moment is the highest that we can ever achieve: the fellowship of the Holy Spirit in the Divine Liturgy. And this connection to God and one another is reflected in the intensity and energy of the Festival – the dancing and the music. For both can only take place as you harmoniously cohere; meaning, when you are in relationship with one another.

You have chosen a deeply theological word, "Ascend," for your theme this year, and it is a theme that resonates with every Divine Liturgy; for we say in the Creed: Καὶ ἀνελθόντα εἰς τοὺς οὐρανοὺς, and He ascended into Heaven.

That leap from earth to Heaven – from the Mount of Olives where His Ascension took place, back to the Celestial Palace of the Heavenly Father, is perhaps the greatest leap in history. Every dancer who bounds and springs into the air – usually to the delight of all – pays a kind of tribute to this moment, when the Divine Dance of the Incarnation came full circle.

The Lord descended by His Incarnation;

He leapt onto the Cross out of love for us all, stretching His Holy Hands out to every human being;

Then He descended even further through His death on the Cross and His Burial in the Tomb;

But He arose on the Third Day;

And after Forty Days with His Disciples, He Ascended into Heaven.

My beloved Children in the Lord: there is even a Christmas Carol, which has the Lord commending the dance and saying the following:

Tomorrow shall be my dancing day; I would my true love did so chance To see the legend of my play, To call my true love to my dance;*

In other words, in the dance of the Lord for our salvation, He reaches out to us – like His outstretched hands nailed to the Cross – to bring us into the flow of Divine Love and the fullness of our salvation.

You see, the entirety of the Lord's mission to save us from sin and death, and to grant us eternal and everlasting life, is one continuous flow of life and love – replete with movements and celestial music, commencing at His Birth with the singing of the Holy Angels. The Lord moved through this world, completing the circle of our salvation, and He calls us to it.

When you dance, whether in the lead of the line, or the back of the line, or somewhere in between, you are in the flow of life. This flow is everywhere you go, and can move you in many directions. As you reflect on your experiences here at the Hellenic Dance Festival, I ask that you think as well about how you shall go on

with the movements of your lives.

Here at HDF - you joined hands; you joined steps; and the flow of your physical forms reflected the spiritual connections that we have with one another.

Can you stay connected through love and compassion?

Can you move with others in harmonies of righteousness and peace? Can you practice on this earth, where your feet touch the ground, how we are called to be ... as it is in Heaven?

My friends:

What you have accomplished in these past days is a pattern for your lives. Connection. Harmony. Joy.

May we all ever attain to such ascension in our hearts, spirits, and minds, through the prayers of the Theotokos and all the Saints.

Amen.

* Traditional English Carol, dated by some to the 16th Century.

Photo: John Shelton

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