

HOMILY BY HIS ALL HOLINESS ECUMENICAL PATRIARCH BARTHOLOMEW
DURING THE DIVINE LITURGY ON THE FEAST DAY OF ST. ANDREW AT THE
PATRIARCHAL CATHEDRAL OF ST. GEORGE

Nov 30, 2006

With the grace of God, Your Holiness, we have been blessed to enter the joy of the Kingdom, to "see the true light and receive the heavenly Spirit." Every celebration of the Divine Liturgy is a powerful and inspiring con-celebration of heaven and of history. Every Divine Liturgy is both an anamnesis of the past and an anticipation of the Kingdom. We are convinced that during this Divine Liturgy, we have once again been transferred spiritually in three directions: toward the kingdom of heaven where the angels celebrate; toward the celebration of the liturgy through the centuries; and toward the heavenly kingdom to come.

This overwhelming continuity with heaven as well as with history means that the Orthodox liturgy is the mystical experience and profound conviction that "Christ is and ever shall be in our midst!" For in Christ, there is a deep connection between past, present, and future. In this way, the liturgy is more than merely the recollection of Christ's words and acts. It is the realization of the very presence of Christ Himself, who has promised to be wherever two or three are gathered in His name.

At the same time, we recognize that the rule of prayer is the rule of faith (*lex orandi lex credendi*), that the doctrines of the Person of Christ and of the Holy Trinity have left an indelible mark on the liturgy, which comprises one of the undefined doctrines, "revealed to us in mystery," of which St. Basil the Great so eloquently spoke. This is why, in liturgy, we are reminded of the need to reach unity in faith as well as in prayer. Therefore, we kneel in humility and repentance before the living God and our Lord Jesus Christ, whose precious Name we bear and yet at the same time whose seamless garment we have divided. We confess in sorrow that we are not yet able to celebrate the holy sacraments in unity. And we pray that the day may come when this sacramental unity will be realized in its fullness.

And yet, Your Holiness and beloved brother in Christ, this con-celebration of heaven and earth, of history and time, brings us closer to each other today through the blessing of the presence, together with all the saints, of the predecessors of our Modesty, namely St. Gregory the Theologian and St. John Chrysostom. We are honored to venerate the relics of these two spiritual giants after the solemn restoration of their sacred relics in this holy church two years ago when they were graciously returned to us by the venerable Pope John Paul II. Just as, at that time, during our Thronal Feast, we welcomed and placed their saintly relics on the Patriarchal Throne, chanting "Behold your throne!", so today we gather in their living presence and eternal memory as we celebrate the Liturgy named in honor of St. John Chrysostom.

Thus our worship coincides with the same joyous worship in heaven and throughout history. Indeed, as St. John Chrysostom himself affirms: "Those in heaven and those on earth form a single festival, a shared thanksgiving, one choir" (PG 56.97). Heaven and earth offer one prayer, one feast, one doxology. The Divine Liturgy is at once the

heavenly kingdom and our home, "a new heaven and a new earth" (Rev. 21.1), the ground and center where all things find their true meaning. The Liturgy teaches us to broaden our horizon and vision, to speak the language of love and communion, but also to learn that we must be with one another in spite of our differences and even divisions. In its spacious embrace, it includes the whole world, the communion of saints, and all of God's creation. The entire universe becomes "a cosmic liturgy", to recall the teaching of St. Maximus the Confessor. This kind of Liturgy can never grow old or outdated.

The only appropriate response to this showering of divine benefits and compassionate mercy is gratitude (eucharistia). Indeed, thanksgiving and glory are the only fitting response of human beings to their Creator. For to Him belong all glory, honor, and worship: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; now and always, and to the ages of ages. Amen.

Truly, particular and wholehearted gratitude fills our hearts toward the loving God, for today, on the festive commemoration of the Apostle founder and protector of this Church, the Divine Liturgy is attended by His Holiness our brother and bishop of the elder Rome, Pope Benedict XVI, together with his honorable entourage. Once again, we gratefully greet this presence as a blessing from God, as an expression of brotherly love and honor toward our Church, and as evidence of our common desire to continue – in a spirit of love and faithfulness to the Gospel Truth and the common tradition of our Fathers – the unwavering journey toward the restoration of full communion among our Churches, which constitutes His divine will and command. May it be so.

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