

**Welcome Remarks of His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros of America  
to the incoming students on the first day of classes**

Monday, August 26, 2019

Your Eminence, Your Grace, Distinguished Faculty and Administrators of Hellenic College Holy Cross, Esteemed Students and Seminarians, Beloved Children in the Lord, Dear Brothers and Sisters:

The prayer we just said marks the beginning of a new academic year here at Hellenic College Holy Cross. I am more than happy to be with you today for the first time as your new Archbishop. I am also honored by your presence and your commitment to making this school a place of education and knowledge, but also a place of theology in the sense of a true Christian experience, bearing witness of what the Holy Apostle Peter spoke of as: “the hope that is in you” (1 Peter 3:15), Jesus Christ Himself.

You know even better than I do that a school is about more than passing on knowledge or the process of learning. It is about life itself. During the next few years, you will be shaping your minds, your souls and your hearts through exposure to a rich and unique variety of disciplines and by building lifelong friendships. But in a place like Holy Cross, the liturgy also plays a crucial role in your training. Chapel is not just for seminarians. It is for everyone who, being aware of his or her Christian vocation to become Christlike, wants the Holy Spirit to be a transformative agent of our Salvation, making each one of us agents of the transformation and transfiguration of our world. This transformation is not only spiritual. It is also called to be social or political, according to the level of responsibility God has given us. An Orthodox Christian cannot stay neutral in a highly polarized environment. The leadership skills you learn here will help you, help our Orthodox Church and society as a whole to shape the world based on the divine teachings and values inherited from two thousand years of faith, tradition and continuous renewal.

As you all know, this School has held a special place in my heart since I first came and taught here in the spring of 2004. Moreover, for many years now I have been teaching at the Theological School in Thessaloniki as Assistant Professor of Symbolics, Inter-Orthodox Relations and the Ecumenical Movement, and I intend to continue this crucial part of my personal vocation as a professor and academic here at Holy Cross. Teaching is also the best way to understand the work of our School, form a special connection with the faculty, and cultivate a

direct relationship with our students and seminarians, who are called to serve the Orthodox Church in America, and our Greek Orthodox Archdiocese in particular, in one way or another. Having said that, I wanted to tell each of you that my office door is always open. Should you have any concerns, questions or apprehensions, I will make it my priority to answer them.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in the Lord,

I pray that our Almighty Lord will inspire our faculty to be the best teachers they can, that He will give strength and courage to the entire staff working on this Holy Hill with dedication to the success of its divine mission, and last but not least, that He will open the hearts of our students and seminarians, leading them not only to success, but to the fulfillment of their abilities – the New Testament refers to them as “talents” (Cf. Matthew 25:14-30), offered to the life of our Church and for the life of the world. The way we use those abilities or talents represents a serious moral challenge. St. Basil the Great wrote that: “the definition of vice is this: the evil use, alien to the precepts of the Lord, of the abilities that He has given to us to do the good. On the contrary, the definition of virtue that God wants from us is: the right use of these same abilities, that derive from a good conscience according to the mandate of the Lord.” (Response 2, 1; PG 31). There is virtue in learning, virtue in teaching and virtue in serving. But none of that is possible without God’s Grace, which helps us approach our personal accomplishments in a spirit of thanksgiving for what has been given to us, always striving above all to be good stewards of these gifts.

Finally, I wanted to greet you and welcome you with words of life and love. As we begin this new academic year together, let us celebrate the great work – and the great joy– of teaching and of being taught. I wish you all a year of growth, success and great achievements.

Thank you for your kind attention and God bless you!