

# His Grace **Bishop Irinej** of the Eastern American Diocese Serves His First Liturgy in New York City



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***Bishop Irinej offers hope, consolation, and motivation to the faithful Serbian people in the God-protected City of New York***

His Grace the newly-enthroned Bishop of the Eastern American Diocese Irinej served the Divine Liturgy in New York City on Sunday, October 2, 2016, in Madison Square Park, located close to St. Sava Cathedral. Serving with Bishop Irinej was His Eminence Metropolitan Georgios of Guinea and Western Africa, along with clergy: Protopresbyter Stavrophor Dr. John Behr, Dean of St. Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary; Protopresbyter Stavrophor Aleksandar Vlajković, Dean of the Washington Deanery and parish priest in Boston; Protopresbyter Stavrophor Dr. Živojin Jakovljević, Dean of St. Sava Cathedral in New York City; Protopresbyter Stavrophor Ivan Marjanović, parish priest in Portland, Maine; Protopresbyter Stavrophor Dr. Alexander Rentel, Professor of Canon Law at St. Vladimir's Seminary; Protopresbyter Djokan Majstorović, parish priest in Paterson, New Jersey; Protopresbyter Zoran Radović, parish priest of St. George Church in Elizabeth, New Jersey; Protopresbyter Vladislav Radujković, parish priest in New York City; Presbyter Saša Nedić, parish priest of Holy Ascension Church in Elizabeth, New Jersey; Presbyter Christopher Rocknage, parish priest in Steelton, Pennsylvania; Protodeacon Joseph Matusiak, Protodeacon Vadim Gan, Deacon Dr. Jovan Aničić, and Deacon Larry Soper. Responses were sung by the Cathedral choir directed by Dr. Miloš Raičković.

The service was attended by a large number of the faithful from New York, Paterson, Elizabeth and other area locations. Many of them hastened to thank God for everything, most of all for the preservation of the Living Church, its faithful people, as well as to extend their welcome and greeting to Bishop Irinej, who came by God's grace to offer hope and consolation, encouragement and motivation to restore the fire-ravaged church. In his uplifting sermon, His Grace made this clear, noting that, while for the mo-

ment the faithful Serbian people of New York have been deprived of their cathedral church, which was received as a gift of love from the Anglican Church through Holy Bishop Nikolaj of Žiča and Ohrid, they have not been deprived of hope and God's grace. And this grace instills faith, by which everything is possible. For "if we believe in Christ and His resurrection, neither can this church remain a dead building, because its walls have been chrismated just as every person has who has been baptized into the Orthodox faith." This is the



### ***The children from the folklore group Opančići welcome Bishop Irinej***



most compelling witness that “this church must also rise as a phoenix from its ashes, that it will be resurrected from the dead and live, and that the living Divine Liturgy will again be served beneath its restored roof... And this, our indestructible Cathedral of St. Sava, will also rise from its ashes... to the pride and joy of the Serbian people and our Holy

Father Sava, the first Serbian Archbishop and Enlightener, and our great Saint Nikolaj, who himself prayed here and offered gifts to the Lord God and gave Communion to the holy and faithful people.”

But, although God motivates mankind by His grace because of His boundless love, He similarly anticipates a reciprocal and sincere love from us, not only towards Himself, but also towards every human being. Such love, agape, said Bishop Irinej, represents the highest vision of love. Indeed it means the Cross in its fullness, which is manifested

in an embrace with open arms of both God and mankind. “And just as His hands bled for us and our salvation, let us cover all mankind in the embrace of our love and complete the Cross in our own

**“Only one who receives love from the Lord and returns that love and who loves everyone, only he can truly be called a Christian.”**

lives. For only one who receives love from the Lord and returns that love and who loves everyone, only he can truly be called a Christian, and that one alone carries the Cross of Christ in his heart, his soul and his mind.”

This day was particularly unique because His Eminence Metropolitan Georgios of Guinea and Western Africa was present. Although he is himself a missionary, a preacher of the Gospel of Christ on the African continent who has attended many celebrations, he was especially elated to have the opportunity to participate in this

service. Addressing Bishop Irinej and the faithful present, the Metropolitan declared that Bishop Irinej is the only person who by his energy and strength could have succeeded in bringing about this historic moment. “Although I did not understand much of what was said in Serbian today during the services, that did not bother me because I feel that we share the

same spirit of Orthodoxy. What connects us is not language, nor the land of our origin or the nation from which we have come, but rather our faith in Jesus Christ and the Orthodox Church. When I sent photos of today’s services to Greece to witness to and share the experience, and to show what the Serbs are doing in the center of New York, they were immediately published in the press.” According to the Metropolitan, faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and love for Him is the foundation of psychological and physical stability, without which it is impossible to master oneself. Speaking about those who are unbelievers and who consider faith to be a mental illness, His Eminence emphasized that it is actually unbelief that is the source of insanity, causing people today to medicate themselves constantly to control their nerves, their bodies and minds. Exhorting Bishop Irinej to persevere in preaching the Gospel, the Metropolitan pointed out that we Christians, while condemning



jihadists and Muslims for the things they do for their faith, do not ask ourselves what we have done to witness to Jesus Christ. That is why it is necessary, in the Metropolitan's words, that we, as witnesses to the Gospel, not be ashamed of our faith, but rather that we together openly proclaim it. For, although we speak different languages, we believe in the same God. Expressing his joy that Serbia is Greece's best friend and neighbor, Metropolitan Georgios concluded that these two peoples who continue to grow in their firm faith are extraordinary because, by God's grace, they never gave in during the 450 years of the Ottoman yoke.

*This article was graciously translated from Serbian to English by Protopresbyter-Stavrophor Rade Merick.*



## Serbian people pray for the wellbeing of New York City

In conclusion, it is necessary to point out that this significant event could not have taken place without the indispensable help of many. We take this opportunity to express our appreciation to all those who participated in its organization and contributed to its success. This meaningful first Divine Liturgy and procession around the Cathedral since the fire could not have come about without the support and participation of the city officials who accommodated our church. From the perspective of the Orthodox Serbs this event was significant not only for the Serbian community but for the City of New York itself, which just a few days earlier had been the target of bombings, and for which, as for the Serbian people as well, God's mercy and grace are indispensable. Our church is grateful to the Madison Square Park administration and to the mayor's office. The Park authorities not only approved our use of the site, but also erected a huge tent, sound system, lighting and all necessary furnishings, and were present the entire time of the services to secure the area and make the services possible. The mayor's office also extended itself and furnished a police escort for the procession which, following the Liturgy, headed across Broadway towards the Cathedral and circled the entire block where the Cathedral is located. During the procession heartfelt prayers were offered to the Lord on each side of the church, that He preserve this holy temple, the people and this city from every evil and misfortune, "famine, plague, earthquake, flood, fire, massacre, invasion by enemies and every death-dealing injury."

This meaningful gathering was documented with a large number of photographs, which testify to the sublimity and great beauty of this historic event. In them are seen the radiant faces of the faithful, shining with universal hope. But no matter how magnificent all these physical images and words may be, they are not adequate to show the warmth of grace, which radiated on that day.

