



# GREEK ORTHODOX METROPOLIS OF NEW JERSEY

## ΙΕΡΑ ΜΗΤΡΟΠΟΛΙΣ ΝΕΑΣ ΙΕΡΣΕΗΣ

Sunday of Orthodoxy, 2009

The Reverend Clergy

Honorable Archons of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, Esteemed Members of the Metropolitan Council, Esteemed Members of the Parish Councils, Philoptochos Societies, Faculty and Students of the Catechetical and Greek Afternoon Schools, Directors and Participants of all Youth Organizations, and all devout Orthodox Christians of the Greek Orthodox Communities of our Holy Metropolis of New Jersey

My Beloved in the Lord,

The day has arrived that our Holy Church has been preparing us for, the season of Great and Holy Lent.

On this first Sunday of Great and Holy Lent we commemorate our forefathers who contended against the same spiritual enemy, by courageously struggling against the impious heresy of iconoclasm. Their struggle and endurance throughout this difficult time, and their faith in the Lord brought them ultimately to triumph. *"Blessed be the Lord, my rock, who trains my hands for war, and my fingers for battle; my rock and my fortress, my stronghold and my deliverer, my shield and he in whom I take refuge, who subdues the peoples under Him."* (Psalm 144:1-2) Their triumph brought about the eventual restoration and glorious return of icons to the Church. We remember their perseverance, marked by inexplicable sufferings and bold confessions of the pure and undefiled faith of the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church.

As our forbearers withstood iconoclasm, *of old*, we must now withstand the same enemy of the Church, as the Apostle Paul warned the Ephesians, *"Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we are not contending against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places."* (Ephesians 6: 10-12) Today we do not have to worry about the removal of the holy icons from the Church, but rather the iconoclasm of our day involves the surrendering of our entire Faith.

Society today tells us that we are foolish and simple minded for believing in God, specifically in the one true God, Jesus Christ. In our time we are taught to worship the earthly and the corruptible whatever that may be. Some worship themselves, for how often do we read or hear about how to improve our body and our image. The young and the old are inundated with messages of how to improve their image and their bodies. How foolish we are that we do

not comprehend that it is in His image and likeness that we were created. The folly of mankind has never been greater than to think that we can improve upon the divine. Some worship the elusive spirits, but in truth what they seek is for justification and the easy road. Some worship what they call, " *nothing*", as they claim that there is no God, and their faith is only in their own works.

Today, in the midst of this glorious feast, we are emboldened – for in this feast we see all heresy defeated, truth triumphant, Christ as King and Lord over all – therefore let us all raise our voices in song, let us make our sacred processions, let us proclaim this Triumph of Orthodoxy. Then, let us ensure that which we celebrate today in our Churches, grows within our own hearts as we struggle to meet the challenges of the Great Fast, not so we might boast amongst ourselves and our brethren, but rather that we might arrive at the bright and radiant feast of our Lord's Pascha, by holding firm to the undefiled faith and traditions which we have received from our forefathers across these many ages. That we might be as Saint John Chrysostom says in his Paschal homily, "*...If any have labored long in fasting, let him now receive his recompense. If any have wrought from the first hour, let him today receive his just reward.*" (Paschal homily of Saint John Chrysostom)

May this season of Holy and Great Lent be filled with the blessings from on high, for each of you individually, your families, and for our Holy Metropolis, and may we journey together to our Lord's glorious Pascha supporting, loving, and praying for each other and those in need.

With Paternal Love and Blessings,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Metropolitan Evangelos". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style. The word "Metropolitan" is written in a larger, more prominent script than "Evangelos". The signature is centered horizontally and is overlaid on a background of a repeating, faint watermark pattern.

† EVANGELOS  
Metropolitan of New Jersey

*To be read from the pulpit on Sunday, March 8<sup>th</sup> 2009*