



GREEK ORTHODOX METROPOLIS OF NEW JERSEY

ΙΕΡΑ ΜΗΤΡΟΠΟΛΙΣ ΝΕΑΣ ΙΕΡΣΕΗΣ

Sunday of Orthodoxy 2017

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

“Savior and Deliverer is He who raised up from the tomb and from the bonds those born on earth, for He is God; and He destroyed Hades’ bars and gates, and on the third day arose, as the Master of all.” (Resurrectional Kontakion)

My Beloved,

Every year, at the end of the first week of Holy and Great Lent, we celebrate the feast of the Triumph of Orthodoxy. Every year, the liturgical tradition calls us to reflect with humility and modesty on what it means for our lives today and for the life of our Church. It is not the triumph of a group of people over another group of people. It is not a triumph of one community over another. It is the Triumph of the Divine Truth which allows us to pray in front of icons thanks to the mystery of Christ becoming man and giving His life for us once and for all.

Without Christ’s incarnation, it would be impossible to pray in front of icons today. What seems natural in our spiritual life today is the result of a long and painful controversy that unfolded more than a millennium ago. The purpose of today’s feast is the recognition of the legitimacy of venerating icons, not only as sacred art, but as a way of confessing the union in Christ of two natures, divine and human, a union essential for our salvation. Icons are not idols, but the declaration of the true faith. As Saint John of Damascus wrote: *“Now, however, when God has been seen clothed in flesh, and talking with mortals, I make an image of the God whom I see. I do not worship matter, I worship the God of matter, who became matter for my sake, and deigned to inhabit matter, who worked out my salvation through matter.”*

As we celebrate this feast today, we should also reflect on the meaning of the *“image of God”* in us. Each and every one of us has been made by God, as it is written in the Holy Bible: *“Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness.”* (Genesis 1:26) The mystery of our nature is in God, while God is present in our nature through the gift of image and likeness. This

divine image in us is beauty, freedom, dignity and grace. Do we recognize it each time we meet someone? We should try. A human being may not appear to possess such beauty, but those who meet him should be able – as those who daily venerate the icons of Christ, of the Theotokos and of the Saints – to see in him or her the shining presence of the Holy Spirit, as God revealing Himself in the humblest of His servants.

The vision of such a divine image requires both faith and work, as Saint James writes in his Epistle: *“What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,’ but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.”* (James 2:14-17) This is why it is essential to acknowledge and support the crucial work of the Philoptochos Sisterhood of the Greek Orthodox Metropolis of New Jersey. Your support is essential and makes a tremendous difference in our sisters’ mission. **A special offering tray will be passed today in all of the Parishes of our Metropolis** so you can actively participate in the fast by helping the poor through your unselfish and generous giving. Our faith is one of love and mercy. Begin this Great Lenten Season by fighting poverty and injustice, and by granting healing to your soul and spirit through your heartfelt financial assistance to our Metropolis of New Jersey Philoptochos Sisterhood. Please support them according to your heart: *“Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works”* (James 2:18)

May this Holy and Great Lent bring you many blessings, love, humility, patience and all of the virtues that we need for our salvation, and may we journey together to our Lord’s glorious Resurrection with joy, praying for each other and for 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.

† E V A N G E L O S
Metropolitan of New Jersey