



GREEK ORTHODOX METROPOLIS OF NEW JERSEY

ΙΕΡΑ ΜΗΤΡΟΠΟΛΙΣ ΝΕΑΣ ΙΕΡΣΕΗΣ

March 15, 2015: The 50th Anniversary of the Civil Rights March in Selma, Alabama

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 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,

“Glory to the Most High! May this mark the beginning of a new age for all humankind, an era when the Word of God charts and guides our lives” (the late Archbishop Iakovos of North and South America after President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act of 1964.)

Archbishop Iakovos’ support of the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and the faith-based American Civil Rights Movement, actualized by their fateful march from the Brown Chapel of the African Methodist Episcopal Church to the Dallas County Courthouse in Selma, Alabama on March 15, 1965, brought Greek-Americans and African-Americans much closer and created a solid bond between the two communities that is most powerful even to this very day. Our highly revered Archbishop marched with his friend, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., because he said that he answered *“a God-given call for the Greek Orthodox Church, which has never hesitated to fight when it felt it must, for the rights of mankind.”* His vested interest in the Civil Rights Movement as the spiritual leader of more than 3 million Orthodox Christians in the western Hemisphere, and participation in Selma with other marchers helped bring to fruition the passage of voting rights legislation. My beloved, Archbishop Iakovos’ overall efforts pushed the United States in a positive direction of equality.

Dr. King said in his iconic *I Have a Dream* speech: *“We have also come to this hallowed spot to remind America of the fierce urgency of Now...Now is the time to lift our nation from the quicksand of racial injustice to the solid rock of brotherhood. Now is the time to make justice a reality for all of God’s children...We cannot turn back...Let us not wallow in the valley of despair, I say to you today, my friends...I have a dream today! I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, and every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made plain, and the crooked places will be made straight; and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed and all flesh shall see it together (Isaiah 40:4-5).”* Indeed, the precedence of Orthodoxy is to face and eliminate all forms of discrimination. Indeed, the Church and its God-ordained principles brought into focus the eradication not only of the wrongs inflicted upon the African-American community but upon all peoples who have been discriminated as a result of race, ethnicity, gender, and creed. My fellow Orthodox Christians, we must stand firm in the defense of inalienable human dignity and worth.

The human being has the capacity to become god-like or to achieve *theosis* because **God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness (Genesis 1:26)**. The so-called “natural human rights” are rooted in the inherent, God-given, worth or dignity of each and every human being. Any affront to his or her nature is an affront to the Almighty and bears the harshest penalty (Genesis 9:6). Therefore, **“Open your mouth for the mute, for the rights of all who are destitute. Open your mouth, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy (Proverbs 31:8-9). Give justice to the weak and the fatherless; maintain the right of the afflicted and the destitute (Psalm 82:3)”. “Learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow’s cause (Isaiah 1:17). There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:28)”**. True humanity and real human rights have been revealed and fulfilled in the Incarnation of the Son of God – Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior.

The Declaration of Independence of the United States of America states that God Himself bestowed our rights and liberties upon us. ***We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.*** The Civil Rights March in Selma ever-reminds us that the entire system of government of America is anchored upon this unique premise. No other bulwark exists to safeguard the natural rights of human beings except Divine sanction. The removal of God removes all claims to liberty, rights, meaning, and purpose. ***The heavens declare the glory of God. And the firmament shows his handiwork. Day unto day utters speech, and night unto night reveals knowledge. There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard (Psalm 19:1-3).***

Eternal be the memory of such dynamic and adamant faith-based visionaries, leaders, heroes, and champions of human rights and dignity such as Archbishop Iakovos and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

As your Metropolitan, Spiritual Father, and Leader, I declare on this 50th Anniversary of the Civil Rights March in Selma that:

The Orthodox faithful of our God-saved Greek Orthodox Metropolis of New Jersey stand side-by-side with our brothers and sisters of the human race for equality, life, the pursuit of happiness, and the right to live as free people, in one and the same Nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

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