



GREEK ORTHODOX METROPOLIS OF NEW JERSEY

ΙΕΡΑ ΜΗΤΡΟΠΟΛΙΣ ΝΕΑΣ ΙΕΡΣΕΗΣ

Sunday, March 1, 2015

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,

John the Baptist cried out, *Repent, for the Kingdom of the Heavens is at hand* (Matthew 3:2). Indeed, we will concretely experience and live dynamically in the Kingdom when our Lord, Great God, and Savior Jesus Christ inaugurates it mystically through His glorious Three Day Bodily Resurrection from the Dead at Pascha. For now, we must repent, change, and prepare to receive the Kingdom and the Lord of Lights through the spiritual course of Great and Holy Lent, which began in 2015 on Clean Monday, February 23. This preparation must be a family affair if it is to be successful and fruitful.

The most effective way to teach our children the joy of the liturgical life of the Church is to embrace it in our own lives. As Orthodox, we fast from food to be able to fast from sin. Fasting is not magic, but when we feast at the banquet of our souls through fasting we see God transforming our worldly desires towards His Kingdom. Fasting is not just about food, but also about healing our souls and caring for our neighbor by spending all that we can to visit the sick, the imprisoned, and feed and clothe the poor. Isaiah the Prophet (58:6) said: *Look, the fast of my choice is this: relax all your iniquitous restrictions, loosen the shackles of your oppressive covenants, let your ruined debtors go free, and tear up all your unjust agreements. Break up your bread into portions for the starving; and if you see a man who is in want of clothing, measure and clothe him yourself.* Fasting, accomplished through just acts of mercy and giving, helps us to achieve our goal. Fasting is therefore a way our Orthodox Church teaches us to love God with all our heart, mind, and soul, and to love our neighbors as ourselves.

Our *orthopraxia* – the correct way of thinking about, living, worshipping, and glorifying the Triune God – is especially celebrated today, the First Sunday of Great and Holy Lent, which is also called the Triumph of Orthodoxy and the reestablishment of the Orthodox veneration of holy icons in the liturgical life of the Church. This was solidified by the Seventh Ecumenical Council (the Second Council of Nicaea) in 787 AD on the basis of holy Scripture and from a series of passages from the Church Fathers. The authority of the latter was decisive. Unfortunately, Iconoclasm continued for several years after this council. However, on March 11, 843, the final restoration of the images was celebrated in a triumphal procession from the Church of Blachernae to Hagia Sophia, the “Synodikon of Orthodoxy,” compiled by St. Methodius (+847) and based upon the Seventh Ecumenical Council,

was read, and the final Triumph of Orthodoxy was established. The theme of the day is victory of the true Faith. *This is the victory that overcomes the world – our faith* (1 John 5:4).

In tune with the core theme of Great and Holy Lent and the Sunday of Orthodoxy is the Greek Orthodox Metropolis of New Jersey Philoptochos Sisterhood. Our Sisterhood stands once again at the forefront as the icon of philanthropy. It needs your financial support in order to care for our neighbor in need. A special offering tray will be passed today in all Parishes of our Metropolis so you may 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 smashing poverty and injustice, and by granting healing to your soul and spirit through your heartfelt financial assistance toward our Metropolis of New Jersey Philoptochos Sisterhood. *And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as you have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, you have done it unto me* (Matthew 25:40). Our fellow human being right next to us is the icon of our Lord. Let us honor the icon by giving from the heart in order to make a difference in someone else's life who truly needs our support. Live your Sacred Faith and Tradition upon which Almighty God established creation itself.

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

To be read from the pulpit on Sunday, March 1, 2015

Checks should be made payable to the *Metropolis of New Jersey Philoptochos Sisterhood*

