



GREEK ORTHODOX METROPOLIS OF NEW JERSEY

ΙΕΡΑ ΜΗΤΡΟΠΟΛΙΣ ΝΕΑΣ ΙΕΡΣΕΗΣ

Feast of the Annunciation 2019

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 Youth Organizations, and all devout Orthodox Christians of the Greek Orthodox Communities of our Holy Metropolis of New Jersey

My Beloved in the Lord,

Today the Church celebrates something that we often take for granted. In the Feast of the Annunciation we not only see the initiation of our salvation through the response that the Mother of God gave the Archangel Gabriel, but we see an important element which is highlighted in this feast – freedom. We celebrate this freedom for a variety of reasons since it is an integral part of our Orthodox and cultural identity. Freedom cannot be reduced to a merely political expression. In reality, the idea of freedom is, first and foremost, a theological expression.

We first experienced this freedom in the Garden of Eden when God created humanity with a body and a soul. This gift of our being as humans contains a special element that was granted to no other creature in all of creation except the human and this is the gift of free will. Every other creature in creation functions by means of a desire to survive and instinct, but none of them have been given the gift of free will which we were specially granted by God. With free will, however, comes tremendous responsibility. God gives us the freedom to do as we wish. He respects our freedom so much that He allows us to disobey Him and to even hate Him. As the omnipotent and all-powerful God that He is, He also is surpassing in love so much so that He would allow His creation to defy Him. He does not force us to obey Him nor does He compel us to love Him, but He only asks for us to these things out of our own free will. When humanity fell in the Garden of Eden, God sought to allow our return to Paradise using the same freedom that we ourselves had used to distance us from Him. It would end up being a young woman by the name of Mary who would freely give her word to God so that she could be the Theotokos, the one who bore God in the flesh.

Mary's trust in the Lord was so great that she willingly undertook the tremendous responsibility of bearing Christ when she freely exclaimed, "*Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word*" (Luke 1:38). Though she knew that by saying yes she would endure great emotional anguish in seeing her son put to death in such a brutal manner, she also

knew that this was a calling from God who was asking her to fulfill this noble task. Such is the example we must take from the Theotokos for ourselves in our lives. We must be open to God's call for each of us and freely say yes. For by using our freedom not for ourselves, but for God and our neighbor, we store up riches in heaven.

Freedom also takes on an additional significance today as we celebrate the 198th anniversary of Greek Independence. It is not by happenstance that those of us of Greek heritage celebrate Greek Independence Day on the same day as the feast of the Annunciation. In the Annunciation we were freed from the ancient curse. In Greek Independence we were freed from the cruel oppression of the Ottoman Turks. In the Annunciation we sought freedom so that we could return to God. In Greek Independence, we sought freedom so that we could freely practice our faith. It is of the utmost importance to remember, however, that this gift of freedom is not a freedom *from* another, but a freedom *towards* love especially as we hear in Scripture, "*You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love*" (Gal. 5:13). In celebrating and commemorating the heroic struggle of our Greek ancestors, we acknowledge that the freedom they sought was not just for themselves, but for the generations thereafter who would reclaim their homeland and pass down their Orthodox faith and traditions to the following generations.

My Beloved in the Lord, do not look at freedom as something abstract or only to be understood in a contemporary context. Instead, recognize that freedom is a gift from God which, when not used selfishly, is the epitome of love. Use your freedom to help others instead of helping just yourself. Use your freedom to follow God's commandments since He gave you such a magnificent gift. Use your freedom to live your Orthodoxy at all times and at every hour. Use your freedom in love because we are a reflection of our Creator and in doing so "*we might acknowledge that our individuality, which we so revere, is not entirely our own*".

It is my hope that you will reflect on the meaning of freedom principally as a Christian concept and then in a contemporary context. Furthermore, I pray that the Theotokos continues to be an inspiration for each and every one of you as the model of using freedom to the glory of God. Praying you have a blessed remainder to Holy and Great Lent, I remain

With Paternal Love and Blessings,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Metropolitan Evangelos". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial 'M'.

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



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Πρός τόν εὐλαβέστατον Ἱερόν Κληρόν,
Τούς Ἐντιμοτάτους Ἀρχοντας τοῦ Οἰκουμενικοῦ ἡμῶν Πατριαρχείου,
Τούς Προέδρους καί τά Μέλη τῶν Ἐκκλησιαστικῶν Συμβουλίων,
Τάς Προέδρους καί τά Μέλη τῶν Φιλοπτώχων Ἀδελφοτήτων,
Τούς διδάσκοντας καί διδασκομένους τῶν Κατηχητικῶν καί Ἑλληνικῶν Σχολείων,
Τάς Ὄργανώσεις τῆς Νεολαίας καί ἅπαν τό Χριστεπώνυμον πλήρωμα τῶν εὐσεβῶν Ὁρθοδόξων
Χριστιανῶν τῆς Ἱερᾶς Μητροπόλεως Νέας Ἱερσέης.

**«Σήμερον τῆς σωτηρίας ἡμῶν τό κεφάλαιον, καί τοῦ
ἀπ' αἰῶνος Μυστηρίου ἢ φανέρωσις»
(Ἀπολυτίκιον ἑορτῆς Εὐαγγελισμοῦ)**

Ἀγαπητοί ἐν Χριστῷ ἀδελφοί,

Ὁ Εὐαγγελισμός τῆς Θεοτόκου δεσπόζει στόν ἑορτολογικό κύκλο τῆς Ἐκκλησίας μας, καθὼς ἀποτελεῖ τήν ἀπαρχή τῆς σωτηρίας τοῦ ἀνθρωπίνου γένους ἀπό τά δεσμά τῆς ἁμαρτίας καί τοῦ θανάτου. Δι' αὐτῆς ἀποκαλύπτεται **«τῆς σωτηρίας ἡμῶν τό κεφάλαιον καί τοῦ ἀπ' αἰῶνος Μυστηρίου ἢ φανέρωσις»**. Διότι, ἀφοῦ οἱ πρωτόπλαστοι ἀπέτυχαν νά ἀνυψωθοῦν καί νά ὁμοιωθοῦν **«κατά χάριν»** μέ τόν Δημιουργό τους, ὁ Θεός ἀπό ἄμετρη ἀγάπη καί εὐσπλαχνία, ἀποφάσισε τήν δική Του κάθοδο πρός τούς ἀνθρώπους. Ὅπως ἀναφέρεται καί στό ἀπολυτίκιο τῆς σημερινῆς ἑορτῆς, ὁ Υἱός τοῦ Θεοῦ **«νῖός τῆς Παρθένου γίνεται»**, ὥστε νά θεραπεύσει τήν **«πεπτωκυῖα»** ἀνθρώπινη φύση καί νά τῆς προσφέρει μία νέα **«ἐν Χριστῷ... Καινή κτίσις»**.

Ὅταν, λοιπόν, ἔφθασε ὁ κατάλληλος καιρός, ἀπέστειλε τόν ἀρχάγγελο Γαβριήλ νά κομίσει στήν Ἁγία Παρθένο τό μήνυμα τῆς ἐλεύσεως τοῦ Κυρίου. Ἡ κόρη τῆς Ναζαρέτ, ἡ εὐλογημένη καί στολισμένη μέ ὅλα τά χαρίσματα τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος, ὅπως ἐπισημαίνει ὁ ἅγιος Γρηγόριος ὁ Παλαμᾶς, συνεπικουρεῖ στό μυστήριο τῆς σωτηρίας τῶν ἀνθρώπων καί γίνεται συναίτιος τῆς ἀπολύτρωσης καί τοῦ ἁγιασμοῦ τους. Ὡς **«ἔμψυχος παράδεισος»**, γεννᾷ τόν Χριστό καί τροφοδοτεῖ μέ τή Χάρη τῆς ὅλης τῆς Ἐκκλησίας. Ὡς δεύτερη Εὐα, διά τῆς ὑπακοῆς τῆς στό θέλημα τοῦ Θεοῦ, καταργεῖ τήν ἀνυπακοή τῆς πρώτης Εὐας στή Θεία Ἐντολή. Ὑπακούει στό Θεῖο πρόσταγμα καί ἀποδέχεται μέ τέλεια πίστη τό πρωτάκουστο μυστήριο, ὅτι θά γεννήσει τόν Υἱό τοῦ Θεοῦ καί συγχρόνως θά εἶναι **«νύμφη ἀνύμφευτος»** καί ἀειπαρθένος. Δανεῖζει στόν Θεό τήν ἀνθρώπινη φύση καί μέ τόν τρόπο αὐτόν γίνεται **«γέφυρα μετάγουσα τούς ἐκ γῆς πρός οὐρανόν»** καί ἀπαρχή τῆς Καινῆς κτίσεως. Μέ αὐτήν τήν τέλεια πίστη καί ὑπακοή τῆς στό θέλημα τοῦ Θεοῦ ἐκπροσωπεῖ τή θέληση ὅλου τοῦ ἀνθρωπίνου γένους νά ἀνυψωθεῖ καί νά ἀποτελέσει τή **«βασιλείαν τοῦ Θεοῦ»** μέ γενάρχη τόν Χριστό, τόν Υἱό τοῦ Θεοῦ.

Σήμερα όμως εορτάζουμε όχι μόνο τον Ευαγγελισμό τῆς Ὑπεραγίας Θεοτόκου, ἀλλά καί τόν εὐαγγελισμό τοῦ ἔθνους μας, καθὼς αὐτὴ τὴν εὐλογημένη ἡμέρα διάλεξαν οἱ ἔνδοξοι πρόγονοί μας, ὄχι τυχαῖα, γιὰ νὰ κηρύξουν τὸ 1821 τὴν Ἐπανάσταση κατὰ τῶν Ὀθωμανῶν κατακτητῶν. Οἱ Ἕλληνες ἀγωνιστές, στό μοναστήρι τῆς Ἁγίας Λαύρας, ἔθεσαν ὡς προστάτιδα τῆς ἐθνικῆς μας παλιγγενεσίας τὴν Παναγία καί μπροστὰ στὴν εἰκόνα τῆς ἔδωσαν τὸν βαρὺ ὄρκο τους «Ἐλευθερία ἢ Θάνατος», τὸν ὁποῖο καί τήρησαν πολεμώντας μὲ ἀπαράμιλλη τόλμη καί γενναιότητα, χωρὶς κανέναν συμβιβασμό. Χιλιάδες Ἕλληνες, κληρικοί καί λαϊκοί, μὲ σύνθημά τους τὸν στίχο τοῦ Ρήγα Φερραίου «Καλύτερα μιᾶς ὥρας ἐλεύθερη ζωὴ, παρά σαράντα χρόνια σκλαβιά καί φυλακὴ», ἔχυσαν τὸ αἷμα τους γιὰ νὰ διαλυθεῖ τὸ ζοφερὸ σκοτάδι τῆς ὑποδούλωσης καί νὰ ἀνατείλει ἡ ἐλευθερία τοῦ Γένους μας.

Ἀγαπητοί μου ἀδελφοί,

Ὡς ὀρθόδοξοι χριστιανοὶ στεκόμαστε μὲ δέος μπροστὰ στό ἱερώτατο πρόσωπο τῆς Θεομήτορος καί τὴν εὐγνωμονοῦμε, διότι ἡ σωτηρία μας ἐπισφραγίστηκε ἀπὸ τὴ δικὴ τῆς ὑπέριστα συμβολὴ στό ἔργο τῆς θείας Οἰκονομίας. Καθῆκον καί ἱερὴ μας ὑποχρέωση εἶναι νὰ φανοῦμε ἀντάξιοι αὐτῆς τῆς δωρεᾶς, νὰ μείνουμε σταθεροὶ καί ἀκλόνητοι στὴν πίστη μας. Ἄς ἀπευθύνουμε, λοιπόν, στὴν Ὑπεραγία Θεοτόκο, τὴν προσευχὴ νὰ ἔχει πάντοτε ὑπὸ τὴ σκέπη τῆς τόσο τὸ ἔθνος, ὅσο καί τὴν φιλόθεο Ὁμογένειά μας. Καί, ἐμπνεόμενοι ἀπὸ τὴ δικὴ τῆς ὑπακοή, μὲ τὴ δικὴ μας ταπείνωση καί συμμετοχὴ στό Ἅγιο Ποτήριο, νὰ ἀξιωθοῦμε διὰ πρεσβειῶν Τῆς νὰ βαδίσουμε τὴν ὁδὸ τῆς σωτηρίας, πού ὀδηγεῖ στὸν Παράδεισο.

Χρόνια πολλά καί πάντα ἐλεύθεροι!

Ο ΜΗΤΡΟΠΟΛΙΤΗΣ



† Ὁ Νέας Ἱερσῆς ΕΥΑΓΓΕΛΟΣ