



GREEK ORTHODOX METROPOLIS OF NEW JERSEY

ΙΕΡΑ ΜΗΤΡΟΠΟΛΙΣ ΝΕΑΣ ΙΕΡΣΕΗΣ

New Ecclesiastical Year 2016

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

**“While you have the light, believe in
the light, that you may become sons of light.”**

(John 12: 36)

My Beloved,

Exactly forty days ago, on the Feast of the Transfiguration, Christ and His disciples went up Mount Tabor. While He was transfigured in front of Peter, James and John, our Lord spoke with Moses and Elijah *“who appeared in glory and spoke of His decease which he was about to accomplish in Jerusalem.”* (Luke 9:31)

As we progress through the liturgical year, we should remember with gratitude the gift of light granted to us by God not only on the day of the Transfiguration, but first and foremost on the day of our baptism. Light and the Cross are inseparable in the Christian life, as they are the two sides of the unique mystery of the Resurrection. As Saint John the Theologian wrote in his Gospel: *“And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.”* (John 1:5) The light of the Cross can be many things in our life, and Christ’s last gesture during His crucifixion should be considered as His legacy to us two millennia after His death. His last words to the world were: *“I thirst.”* (John 19:28) This phrase seems very unusual for someone about to die after hours of pain and suffering. But Jesus’ thirst here is not a thirst for water, it is a thirst for life and fulfillment. By these words, not only did He accomplish all of the past prophecies about Him, He also showed us the irrepressible need for life through water, and the

irrepressible need for Christian life through forgiveness. Saint Luke wrote describing the scene of the crucifixion: *“And then Jesus said, ‘Father, forgive them, for they do not know, what they do.’*” (Luke 23:34)

Jesus goes beyond a simple wish and request; He speaks with divine authority. Because in compassion, in solidarity He identifies with every sufferer: the death, the pain, the agony of each of those who suffer is His. And so, when He prays, *“Father, forgive them, for they do not know, what they do,”* He prays for each of us not only in His own name, but in the name of all those upon whom evil has been visited through human sin. But it is not only Christ who forgives; everyone who has suffered in soul, in body, in spirit - everyone is called to grant freedom and forgiveness to those who have made them suffer.

Light, life and forgiveness are the three words that our Orthodox Church invites us to reflect upon today, on the feast of the Holy Cross, as we consider the central place of this mystery in our life, which sets us free from our old humanity, renewed by the power of eternal joy. The same joy that Saint Helen experienced when she discovered the precious Cross in Jerusalem, in 325 AD.

Praying that you may be guarded and guided by the power of the precious and Life-giving Cross, 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