



GREEK ORTHODOX METROPOLIS OF NEW JERSEY

ΙΕΡΑ ΜΗΤΡΟΠΟΛΙΣ ΝΕΑΣ ΙΕΡΣΕΗΣ

Sunday of Orthodoxy 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

“The more frequently they are seen in representational art, the more are those who see them drawn to remember and long for those who serve as models, and to pay these images the tribute of salutation and respectful veneration.” (Horos of the 7th Ecumenical Council)

My Beloved,

Today, on the First Sunday of Holy and Great Lent, our Holy Church invites us to commemorate what we call the Triumph of Orthodoxy or the Sunday of Orthodoxy. In this case, the word Orthodoxy should not be understood in a confessional sense. It means the victory of the right faith to which the icons, and their veneration bear witness. The icons are a vivid symbol of what we believe, and of who we believe in. Not only did the 7th Ecumenical Council (787) allow us to pray to, to venerate, and to pay homage to the person represented through their image, icons are also a confession of our faith in Jesus Christ as God and man, as dead and resurrected, as Almighty yet crucified. God stands at the crossroads between two opposite forces and merges them with the power of His love for all of creation. Because of the Divine Incarnation of Christ, the Old Testament prohibition on representing God has been overcome by the fact that Christ, the second Person of the Holy Trinity, has entered into time and History.

Reason tries to describe the face of God using words. The heart uses shapes, colors and nuances. Words are transformed into images that speak to us in a mystical way. Our hearts begin to understand the loving presence of God in our lives when reason reaches the limits of understanding. This is why Christian teaching is so often considered foolishness. According to Saint Paul: *“For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.”* (1 Cor 1:18) With humility, let us pray in front of the icons, in Church and at home, because when we gaze into an icon, the saint on the icon also gazes into us.

The spiritual reality of icons is directly connected to the person represented. Our veneration goes to the saint who fulfilled the human vocation of becoming by grace what God is by nature. All of us are icons of the loving God. We are made in the image of God, granting us dignity and freedom. But our sinful weakness has deteriorated the full expression of this image, this dignity, and this freedom.

The season of fasting during Holy and Great Lent should give us at least a taste of the image of God in all of creation. To restore the image of God in ourselves, our Holy Church invites us to purify our eyes and to acknowledge the presence of God in our lives. We must turn away from our bad habits, our selfishness, and the fullness that hardens our hearts to love. Let us try to make our freedom the means of our conversion and undertake our spiritual warfare.

The ascetic efforts of prayer and fasting remain useless if we forget the charitable mission of the Church. 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 Holy 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, and *"your Fathers who sees in secret will reward you openly."* (Mat 6:6)

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 with a large initial 'M'.

† EVANGELOS
Metropolitan of New Jersey