



# GREEK ORTHODOX METROPOLIS <sup>OF</sup> NEW JERSEY

## ΙΕΡΑ ΜΗΤΡΟΠΟΛΙΣ ΝΕΑΣ ΙΕΡΣΕΗΣ

### Third Sunday of Lent – Stavroproskiniseos 2020

The Very Reverend and Reverend Clergy

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 Communities of the Greek Orthodox Metropolis of New Jersey

My Beloved in the Lord,

Today, on the third Sunday of Holy and Great Lent, we celebrate the midpoint of our Lenten Journey towards the feast of feasts – Holy and Great Pascha. The Church, in her wisdom and desiring to strengthen her people, put at the center of this journey a day for venerating the Holy Cross of Christ. The Church arranged it thusly so that Orthodox Christians would remain steadfast in their faith, strengthened in their Lenten devotion, and emboldened in their prayerfulness as the feast of Pascha approached.

The Cross itself is a paradox. Before the time of Christ the Cross was seen as the most shameful manner by which punishment was delivered as it was reserved for the worst criminals and utilized in the most violent and brutal manner. With the crucifixion of our Lord, however, He transformed its meaning. The Cross thus became a symbol of peace, hope, and faith and the prime illustration of our Lord conquering death. Without the Cross, there is no life and there is no hope.

As we contend with the events surrounding the Coronavirus, we are in need of the faith, hope, and assurance that the Cross brings us. Our society stands at the precipice of the unknown as we learn of more and more people becoming ill and as we observe the toll these events are taking on the physical, emotional, and spiritual health of all people. We witness more drastic measures being taken to confront these issues to the point that Orthodox Christian faithful throughout our country and across the world are unable to personally participate in the Divine Services in their local communities. Now more than ever it is most fitting for us to venerate and honor the Holy Cross of Christ – the symbol of life, the image of victory, and the promise of Christ's

Resurrection. Therefore, even in these bleak circumstances, we must never forget that *“through the Cross, joy has come to all the world.”* We must remain focused on the hope that the Cross brings and venerate it knowing that it is *“truly our source of help having partaken of its fruit, and incorruption instead of death.”* Furthermore, the Cross is the Love of God and our strength at all times, but especially in times of distress. As we hear in the Exapostelation for the Feast of the Holy Cross, *“The Cross is the guardian of the whole world; the Cross is the support and staff of the faithful; the Cross is the beauty of the Church of Christ; the Cross is the mighty strength of kings; the Cross is the glory of Angels; it is the wounding of demons.”* Therefore, begin your devotion to the Cross of Christ by wearing your baptismal Cross and making the sign of the Cross when you awake each morning. Never be fearful of expressing your Orthodox faith by making the sign of the Cross, no matter where you may be because the Cross is our weapon of peace and wall of defense.

My beloved in the Lord, I entreat you to take time out of your day to reflect on the meaning of the Cross and to venerate the Cross in your homes. Come together as a family of faith and offer thanksgiving to God that our Lord willingly gave Himself to be crucified upon the Cross so that we might have life. Make the sign of the Cross as a family before you eat and allow yourselves to always look to the Cross of Christ as your symbol of hope. Let us all look towards the example of Christ and His Cross for how we are to confront the difficulties of our life, knowing that with the help of Christ and His Cross we can overcome all adversity. Finally, let us keep the words of our Lord close to our heart, *“If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me”* (Matt. 16:24).

Praying that our Lord, who was willingly crucified for our salvation, and the power and protection of the Holy, Precious, an Life-Giving Cross be with all of you throughout the remainder of the Lenten season, 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