

GREEK ORTHODOX METROPOLIS OF NEW JERSEY

ΙΕΡΑ ΜΗΤΡΟΠΟΛΙΣ ΝΕΑΣ ΙΕΡΣΕΗΣ

Pastoral Message March 23, 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,

I pray this letter finds you all both physically and spiritually well during these challenging times as we continue our Lenten Journey towards Pascha.

Words can scarcely describe the depth of the current situation being experienced throughout this country and the world regarding the COVID-19 pandemic. The issues that have stemmed from this pandemic have tested the confidence of governments, the determination of communities, the resolve of the strong, the endurance of the frail, and the faith of all people.

In these trying times, it can be difficult for some to keep their faith when all they see around them is panic. Yet even as the world is burdened with uneasiness, we as Orthodox Christians must nevertheless remain steadfast in our faith for *“God is with us”*. In the midst of society’s despondency, we must recognize that God never abandons us and in the throes of the world’s despair, we must project the hope of the Resurrection. How we conduct ourselves is a direct reflection of our personal faith. We cannot give in to sentiments of sensationalism nor can we allow ourselves to be overcome by terror. Instead, we must reflect on the words of our Father when He says, *“Be still and know that I am God”* (Ps. 46:10).

Therefore, I implore each and every one of you, do all you can to nurture your faith during these unsure times. When you arise, offer a prayer of thanksgiving to God that He blessed you with another day saying,

“Glory to You, King, God Almighty, who through Your divine and loving providence have consented that I, an unworthy sinner, should rise from sleep and obtain entrance into Your holy house. Accept, Lord, the voice of my prayer as You accept those of Your holy and spiritual powers; and that not through my defiled lips, but from a pure heart and humble spirit, praise may be offered to You so that I also, with the bright lamp of my soul, may become a companion of the wise virgins and glorify You, God the Word, who is glorified in the Father and the Spirit. Amen.”

During the course of your day, set aside some time to pray to God and to develop a relationship with Him. When you sit down to eat a meal with your family, thank God for everything He has given to you. When you prepare to go to sleep, thank God for having given you the opportunity to experience His blessings once again saying,

“Lord our God, whatever sins I have committed this day, in word, deed or thought, forgive me, for You are good and love all people. Grant me a peaceful and undisturbed sleep. Protect me from every abuse and plot of the evil one. Raise me up in due time that I may glorify You, for You are blessed, together with Your only begotten Son, and Your all-holy Spirit, now and forever and to the ages of ages. Amen.”

Bring all of your troubles and concerns to Him because He will listen and will strengthen you as needed. As much as possible, keep prayer at the center of your lives because the strength of prayer cannot be underestimated. Furthermore, pray in your home together as a family and make your own home, as St. Paul emphasizes, *“κατ’ οἶκον ἐκκλησίαν”* (Rom. 16:5), that is, a church in the home. Though your homes can never substitute the traditional Eucharistic gathering of the entire community, you can nevertheless bring the spirit of the Apostle’s words to fruition by praying and offering thanksgiving to God together as a family.

In the coming days and weeks there will be, undoubtedly, more times of anxiety, but it is at precisely those moments when we will need to pray for the strength and fortitude of God to sustain our faith. There will also come a time when this fierce virus will finally come under control and eventually will come to an end. When this happens, it is imperative that you return to your traditional participation in the Holy Sacraments and in the life of your Communities.

My beloved, even as we continue to be bombarded with the troubling news that has been emanating out of various news sources, do not lose faith and continue to pray. Let us always keep close to our hearts the words of St. Paul, *“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit”* (Rom. 15:13). Finally, let us all turn towards our common Mother, the Theotokos, who is *“the bodily health’s restoration”* as we petition her to intercede for our health and protection. Praying that our loving Lord continues to guard each of you during these difficult times and that the Theotokos protects you all, 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.

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