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Archiepiscopal Encyclical on the Feast of the Three Hierarchs and the Day of Greek Letters

January 30, 2022

Unto the Most Reverend and Right Reverend Hierarchs, Pious Priests and Deacons, the Monks and Nuns, Presidents and Members of Parish Councils, Honorable Archons of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, Members of Leadership 100, the Day and Afternoon Schools, Philoptochos Societies, the Youth, Greek Orthodox Organizations, and the entirety of the Christ-named Plenitude of the Holy Archdiocese of America.

*The Hierarchs of Christ,
the pride of the Fathers, the pillars of the Faith,
and the Teachers and guardians of the Faithful
(Great Vespers of the Three Hierarchs)*

My Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

The Feast of the Saintly Three Hierarchs — Basil the Great, Gregory the Theologian, and John Chrysostom — is an occasion of the greatest joy in the Church. Together, as the hymn says, they stand as “pillars of the Faith,” much like those established in the Book of Revelation when the Lord says: “I will make the victor a pillar in the Temple of My God.... (3:12). Indeed, each of these great Hierarchs was victorious, triumphing over heresy and sophistry. They were the finest examples of the Wisdom of God, who establishes Her own pillars (cf. Proverbs 9:1) to edify the House of God.

As exemplars of true philosophy, each Hierarchy embodies what we call “Greek Letters,” by which we mean the sum and substance of Hellenic culture, language, arts, and sciences. Greek Letters are the building blocks of Western civilization, and the intellectual tools which have shaped its worldview. They are also the means by which



the “Preparation of the Gospel” was effected. On the one hand, there was the person of Saint John the Baptist, who prepared the way for the coming of the Lord to Israel. On the other hand, there was the genius that shone in the lands of ancient Hellas – a genius that not only prepared the Old Testament in the Greek Language (i.e., the Septuagint), but through the expansion of Hellenism through Alexander the Great, spread the fertile mind of Greece to the exact regions where the Gospel would be preached by the Apostles.

Thus, these Three Hierarchs of Christ, became the “Teachers and guardians of the Faithful,” precisely because they paved the way for the best of the Greek heritage to become the handmaiden of the Lord, just like the Theotokos, who brought forth Christ in the world. Following them, “the pride of the Fathers,” let us bring forth Christ in our lives with the fulness of our Hellenic inheritance.

With paternal love in our Lord Jesus Christ,

† ELPIDOPHOROS
Archbishop of America