



# GREEK ORTHODOX METROPOLIS OF NEW JERSEY

## ΙΕΡΑ ΜΗΤΡΟΠΟΛΙΣ ΝΕΑΣ ΙΕΡΣΕΗΣ

Sunday of Orthodoxy 2019

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 Youth Organizations, and all devout Orthodox Christians of the Greek Orthodox Communities of our Holy Metropolis of New Jersey

My Beloved in the Lord,

Every year, at the end of the first week of Holy and Great Lent, we celebrate the feast of the Triumph of Orthodoxy. Every year, the liturgical tradition calls us to reflect with humility and modesty on what it means for our lives today and for the life of our Church. It is not the triumph of a group of people over another group of people. It is not a triumph of one community over another. It is the Triumph of the Divine Truth which allows us to pray in front of icons thanks to the mystery of Christ becoming man and giving His life for us once and for all. Without Christ's incarnation, it would be impossible to pray in front of icons today. Today's feast focuses on the recognition of the legitimacy of venerating icons, not only as sacred art, but as a way of confessing the union in Christ of two natures, divine and human, a union essential for our salvation. Icons are not idols, but the declaration of the true faith. One of the most vivid expressions of this comes from the Second Council of Nicaea in 787 wherein the oros of the council declares, "...it [the depiction of painted icons] *provides confirmation that the becoming man of the Word of God was real and not just imaginary, and it brings us a similar benefit.*"<sup>i</sup>

The "similar benefit" of which the Fathers of the Second Council of Nicaea speak must be in reference to two things. First, they refer to the interdependence of the incarnation of Christ and the depiction of images. The Son of God can be depicted in icons because He willingly took on flesh and also the Son of God could become man precisely because He is the uncreated Icon of the Father. The second thing to which the Fathers refer to as a similar benefit stems from this complex, but important element of our theology. Since we were made in the image of God as we see in Genesis, "*Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness*" (Genesis 1:26), we thus share this nature with our Lord. This is indeed profound since it means that each person is endowed with the same image as Christ whose incarnation and, ultimately, resurrection provides us with the path towards complete restoration of our likeness to God.

Historically, we celebrate the restoration of the icons today, but this also means that we celebrate the image that you and I bear. Just as we reverence the icons we have, we should also reverence each other because we contain within ourselves the same image of our God. Especially

in this first week of Holy and Great Lent, we should challenge ourselves to continually look towards our neighbor with love and compassion, recognizing that when we look at them, we are simultaneously looking at Christ. Be generous to those who are less fortunate since we will all be held accountable for our actions towards them as they are the living images of Christ. As we saw in the Gospel reading just two weeks ago, *“for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me”* (Matt. 25:35-36).

This is also 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 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: *“Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works”* (James 2:18). 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 style and is centered on the page.

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

*To be read from the Pulpit on Sunday, March 17, 2019*

**Checks are to be made payable to the GOMNJ Philoptochos Sisterhood**