



GREEK ORTHODOX METROPOLIS OF NEW JERSEY

ΙΕΡΑ ΜΗΤΡΟΠΟΛΙΣ ΝΕΑΣ ΙΕΡΣΕΗΣ

Archpastoral Message – July 8, 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,

During the past several months our nation has seen immense difficulties, families have endured severe hardships, and countless people have felt the devastating effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic. These challenges tested our fortitude as our local communities and state authorities put sweeping measures in place in an effort to prevent the further spread of this vicious virus. These measures prevented the devout faithful of our Ecclesiastical Communities to gather together in common prayer. Thanks be to God, these restrictions were lifted in due time and faithful Orthodox Christians were able to return to their local Parish Communities.

Although all of you have returned to your Parish Communities, there is still an understandable sense of cautiousness. The faithful have been encouraged to keep social distancing, masks have been required during the course of the Divine Services, sanitizing protocols have been rigorously enforced, and all of our parishes have and continue to abide by all local, state, and CDC regulations. This cautiousness has occasionally led people to mistakenly believe that the manner in which they receive the most Sacred Body and Blood of our Lord, God, and Savior, Jesus Christ poses some type of danger to them. This is most lamentable as nothing can be further from the truth.

The Holy Eucharist is the most pure and sanctifying gift from God which we could ever encounter. Our Lord's Body and Blood could never be contaminated and, as the Holy and Sacred Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate stated in its official Communiqué on June 25, 2020, *"it is impossible that through this Mystery of Mysteries any disease*

might be communicated to those who partake." It is with these words, recognizing the sanctifying and healing power of both body and soul that is offered to us in the Holy Eucharist that I exhort you, my dearly beloved, to have faith in the Divine Gift that God is offering us which will heal us of all our infirmities. Let the words of St. Cyril of Jerusalem, a preeminent Father of the Church, inspire you when he says, *"Do not, therefore, regard the bread and wine as simply that; for they are, according to the Master's declaration, the body and blood of Christ. Even though the senses suggest to you the other, let faith make you firm"* (Catechetical Lectures 22, 6).

Therefore, when you come to the House of God, be encouraged by the words which are proclaimed immediately prior to the faithful receiving Holy Communion, *"With the fear of God, with faith, and with love, draw near."* Do not fear to approach and to receive the Body and Blood of Christ, according to the traditional Orthodox manner from the common chalice and from the common spoon, which is granted unto you for the forgiveness of sins and for eternal life.

Our Lord sanctifies all people and all things with whom He comes into contact. His Body and Blood sanctifies and makes pure all vessels, both human vessels and material vessels, which partake in the Mystery of Holy Communion. The very Incarnation of Christ sanctified the world and all material things when He took on flesh, therefore, all vessels which contain and distribute the Holy Eucharist are purified and made sacred through Him. Thus, we the devout faithful, as His human vessels, and the common chalice and common spoon, as His material vessels, are purified and sanctified through contact with His most Sacred Body and His most Precious Blood.

It is my fervent and constant prayer that God grants each of you even stronger faith so that you may, with abounding love and faith in our Savior, approach to receive His most pure, sacred, and precious Body and Blood for the benefit of your physical and spiritual well-being. Praying our loving Lord blesses you, your families, and your Communities with spiritual strength, 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