

His Eminence
The Most Reverend
Metropolitan JOSEPH



Archbishop of New York and
Metropolitan of
All North America

ANTIOCHIAN ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN ARCHDIOCESE
OF NORTH AMERICA

June 2, 2020

Beloved Faithful in Christ,

Greetings and blessings to you and your families as we prepare for our celebration of Holy Pentecost!

As we stand between these two great feasts of the Ascension of our Lord and Holy Pentecost, our festal joy is intermingled with profound sadness and grief. We witnessed the brutal murder of a defenseless man, George Floyd, by men entrusted by our society to uphold peace and justice. As Orthodox Christians, we are appalled by this act of unjust violence, and we fervently entreat the Lord to grant repose to George's soul and comfort and peace to his grieving family and loved ones.

We are also witnessing protests that speak to the wider issues of racial prejudice and injustice in our society. We do not condone chaos and violence as a means of protest, as they only serve to fan the flames of anger and hatred and harm the very communities the peaceful protestors are working to improve. As Antiochian Orthodox, we can offer our broken-hearted empathy, as many of our faithful have come from countries where they have experienced injustice, and we must forcefully proclaim the equal dignity of every human person as created in the image and likeness of God.

As we see the images of so many places set aflame, let us contemplate the images of fire that the Church will offer us this weekend. On Sunday morning, we will chant a festal hymn: "All the nations in the city of David beheld wonders, when the Holy Spirit descended in fiery tongues." This hymn and many others speak to the teaching that the feast of Pentecost healed the division of humanity into competing nations as a result of the Tower of Babel. In the Old Covenant, God fashioned for Himself a people to receive the Law. In the New Covenant, God brings *all* the nations into unity through the Gift of the Holy Spirit – as Christ foretold to the Samaritan Woman a few short weeks ago that all would worship God "in spirit and truth."

"The disciples were first called Christians in Antioch" (Acts 11: 26)

358 Mountain Road, P.O. Box 5238, Englewood, NJ 07631-5238
(201) 871-1355 T Archdiocese@antiochian.org (201) 871-7954 F

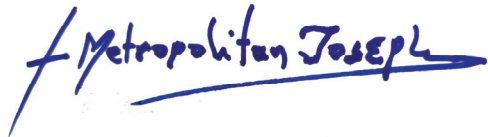
We live in a time when events provoke us to burn with the passions of anger and divisiveness. This weekend, the Church will call us to burn with love and reconciliation towards all. I would like to pose the question: Which fire will we welcome into our hearts?

There is an instructive note placed before the Prayers of Preparation for Holy Communion that reads: “If thou desirest, O man, to eat the Body of the Master, approach with fear, lest thou be scorched; for it is fire. And, before drinking the divine Blood unto communion, reconcile thyself to them that have wronged thee. Then dare to eat the Mystical Food.” To receive the fire that is communing with our Creator, we must put out the flames of our anger and judgments of others and seek reconciliation – even with those who have wronged us.

As we celebrate Pentecost in the midst of these tumultuous days, let us as Orthodox Christians quench the flames of our hatred and passions that we be set afire with the Gift of the Holy Spirit. Let us cultivate the fruits of the Spirit – love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, and self-control – and work towards the love and reconciliation of all.

With fervent prayers for healing and peace, I remain,

Your Father in Christ,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Metropolitan Joseph" with a stylized flourish at the end.

+JOSEPH

Archbishop of New York and Metropolitan of all North America

cc. Our Hierarchs

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