Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross 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,

As we celebrate the universal exaltation of the Precious and Life-Giving Cross, we have the opportunity to reflect on how our Lord’s self-sacrificial decision to be crucified for the life of the world transformed all of creation. Although encountering the crucified Christ fills us with sorrow as we see Him in agony outstretched on the Cross, it was through this act that joy and salvation came to all the world and newness of life was granted to all creation. It is this paradox which uniquely sets us apart from other faiths and which confounds those who are unwilling to understand the glory of God. Joy came through the Cross even though, at the time, the Cross was associated with violence. The Cross bore the fruit of life, even though it was associated with death. In the centuries that have passed since our Lord’s crucifixion, the image of the Cross has been transformed from being a violent method of execution, to being emblematic of life, joy, and salvation. Indeed, the Cross has uplifted and supported generations of saints, clergy, ascetics, and faithful Orthodox Christians who have found comfort in it and who wear it faithfully as a reminder of our love and devotion to Christ and to His Church.

The Lord’s example, however, and His own words remind us that we are to endure our own struggles in order that we may dwell with Him in His everlasting Kingdom. Christ tells us, “If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it” (Matt. 16:24-25). We are called to follow the Lord by taking up our own Crosses and, in this way, we may become worthy of eternal life. The burden of each person’s Cross is different, each according to the will of God. Moreover, there are some Crosses that we bear as a Community. In order to be recipients of the joy the Cross brings and beneficiaries of the eternal life the Cross grants, we must take on the responsibility of bearing both our personal and our communal Crosses.
Therefore, I encourage you to come to the Divine Services, partake of the Body and Blood of Christ, engage in the Church’s ministries, and help to build up the Body of Christ once more so that we may continue the Church’s mission of helping those in need.

During these last several months in which we have endured the harshness of the Coronavirus Pandemic, we have witnessed families, friends, and neighbors adversely affected whether by being afflicted with the virus themselves or suffering the reverberating consequences wrought by the economy. Even more so, the Church and its ministries have endured setbacks as churches were closed for months at the beginning of the Pandemic and Parish Communities are unable to continue many of their ministries. Most lamentably, the annual Feast of the Holy Cross Celebration and Blessing of the Waters which has traditionally taken place every year in Asbury Park since 1947, is unable to be held this year due to the Pandemic. This celebration, which was instituted by Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras when he was Archbishop of North and South America, sought to bring everyone together in prayer for the peace of the world which had just endured the Second World War. Although we will not have the opportunity to be present in Asbury Park this year for the Holy Cross Celebration and Blessing of the Waters, we all should nevertheless pray with all our mind, soul, and strength for the peace of the world and for an end to the Coronavirus Pandemic which has afflicted us for these past several months.

My beloved in the Lord, let us commit ourselves to increased prayer and dedication to Christ and His Church, recognizing that the trials and tribulations we presently endure are temporary, but the life our Lord offers us is everlasting. Let us wear our Cross and make the sign of the Cross, no matter where we are, with joy and without fear. Finally, may we always keep the Cross at the forefront of our spiritual lives remembering the words of St. Paul, “If we have been united with Him in a death like His, we will certainly also be united with Him in a resurrection like His” (Rom. 6:5). Praying that you may be guarded and guided by the power of the Precious and Life-giving Cross, I remain

With Paternal Love and Blessings,

† EVANGELOS
Metropolitan of New Jersey
ΠΟΙΜΑΝΤΟΡΙΚΗ ΕΓΚΥΚΛΙΟΣ ΥΨΩΣΕΩΣ ΤΙΜΙΟΥ ΣΤΑΥΡΟΥ 2020

Πρός τον ευλαβέστατον Ἰερόν Κλήρον,
Τούς Προέδρους καὶ τὰ Μέλη τῶν Ἐκκλησιαστικῶν Συμβουλίων,
Τάς Προέδρους καὶ τὰ Μέλη τῶν Φιλοπτώχων Ἀδελφοτήτων,
Τούς διδάσκοντας καὶ διδασκομένους τῶν Κατηχητικῶν καὶ Ἑλληνικῶν Σχολείων,
Τάς Ὀργανώσεις τῆς Νεολαίας καὶ ἄπαν τὸ Χριστιανών πλήρωμα τῶν εὐσεβῶν Ορθοδόξων
Χριστιανῶν τῆς Ἰερᾶς Μητροπόλεως Νέας Ιερσέης.

«Σταυρός ψηφοταί σήμερον, καὶ κόσμος ἀγιάζεται» (Εξαποστειλάριον Εορτῆς)

Αγαπητοί μου ἀδελφοί,

Μὲ εὐλάβεια, συγκίνηση καὶ ἱερὸ δέος προσκυνοῦμε τὸν Τίμιο καὶ Ζωοποίο Σταυρό τοῦ Κυρίου, ὁ Όποιος ψήφωνται σήμερα στὸ μέσον τῶν Ἰερῶν μας Ναῶν ἀλλὰ καὶ στὸ κέντρο τῆς ψυχῆς καὶ τοῦ νοῦ μας. Ἐσφάσαμε καὶ τιμοῦμε τὸ ἱερόστερο σύμβολο τῆς Ορθοδόξου πίστεως μας, τὸν Σταυρό τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ποὺ ἐξαγάγηκα διὰ τὸν ίδιο τὸν Κυρίο διὰ τῆς θυσίας Του ἐπάνω σὲ Αὐτὸν, νέκρωσε τὸν θάνατο, ἔδωκε ζωὴ στὸν ἄνθρωπο καὶ τοῦ ἀνοίξε καὶ πάλι τὴν θύρα τοῦ Παραδείσου, κάνοντάς τον πολιτή τῆς Οὐρανίου Βασιλείας Του.

Αν καὶ τὸ σύμβολο τοῦ Σταυροῦ ψηφίζεται κάποτε σύμβολο ἀτιμώσεως, ντροπῆς καὶ θανάτου, ὁ Κύριος μὲ τὴν θυσία Του, τὸ μετέτρεψε σὲ σύμβολο ζωῆς, δόξας, τιμῆς, λυτρώσεως, πίστεως, χαρᾶς, ἐλπίδας, σωτηρίας. Ὅπως ψάλλουμε καὶ στὰ πανέμορφα τροπάρια τοῦ Ἐσπερινοῦ τῆς Ἑγκυκλίως, ὁ Τίμιος Σταυρός ἐμελεῖ νὰ γίνει: «τρόπαιο εὐσεβείας, θύρα τοῦ παραδείσου, στήριγμα τῶν πιστῶν, προστασία τῆς Ἐκκλησίας, ἀκαταμάχητο ὁπλὸ ἐναντίον τὸν διαβόλο, δόξα τῶν Αγίων, λιμάνι σωτηρίας, σημείο χαρᾶς, κραταίωμα βασιλέων, ὁδηγός τυφλῶν, ἰατρός ἁθανατών, ἀνάσταση τῶν κεκομιμένων, καὶ σκέπη καὶ προστασία κάθε πιστῶν».

Καὶ εἶναι ὅντως ἀλήθεια ἀδελφοί μου. Ποιὸς ἀπὸ ἐμᾶς δὲν χρησιμοποιεῖ τὸ πανάγιο αὐτὸ σύμβολο στὴν καθημερινότητά του; Πόσες φορές τὴν ἡμέρα δὲν κάνουμε τὸν Σταυρὸ μας, εἰτε ὅταν προσευχόμαστε, εἰτε ὅταν προσκυνοῦμε στὸ Ναό, εἰτε ὅταν ἀντιμετωπίζουμε κίνδυνο καὶ ἀνάγκη. Εἶναι ὁ Σταυρὸς τοῦ Χριστοῦ ποὺ ὅταν τὸν σχηματίζουμε ἐπάνω στὸ σώμα μας, ἀγιαζόμαστε, καὶ παίρνουμε Θεία Χάρη καὶ δύναμιν νὰ νικήσουμε κάθε δυσκολία καὶ κάθε κακό. Κάθε φορὰ ποὺ ἀνεβαίνουμε τὸν δικό μας προσωπικό Γολγοθά, κουβαλώντας ὁ καθένας μας τὸν δικό του σταυρό, εἶναι τότε ποὺ συνειδητοποιοῦμε ὅτι παίρνουμε δύναμιν ἀπὸ τὸν Σταυρὸ τοῦ Χριστοῦ.

Ἰδιαίτερα τὸ τελευταίο διάστημα ἀγαπητοί μου, ὅλη ἡ ἀνθρωπότητα σηκώνει ἕνα σταυρό. Ἡ πανδημία ποὺ ἐνέκυψε ἔχει φέρει τὸν κόσμο μας στὰ ὅρια του. Πλήθος ἀνθρώπων δοκιμάζεται

215 East Grove Street, Westfield, NJ, 07090-1656 • Tel: (908) 301-0500 • Fax: (908) 301-1397
Web: www.nj.goarch.org • E-mail: metropolis@nj.goarch.org
ποικιλοτρόπως, καθώς η καθημερινότητα μας άλλαξε και τά προβλήματα πού προέκυψαν είναι πολλά. Όμως εμείς οἱ Ὀρθόδοξοι Χριστιανοὶ δὲν πρέπει νά ἀπελπισύμαστε καθώς πιστεύουμε στὸν ἀληθινὸ Θεό καὶ μὲ αἰσιοδοξία ἀπενείσουμε τὸ Πανάγιο Σύμβολο τοῦ Τιμίου Σταυροῦ τοῦ Χριστοῦ μας. Αλλάστε γνωρίζουμε ὅτι κανένας ἀνθρώπος πού ἔλπιζε στὸν Θεό δὲν σηκώνει βαρύτερο σταυρό ἀπὸ ἐκεῖνον ποῦ μπορεῖ νά ἀντέξει καὶ ὅτι ἡ σταυρικὴ πορεία, ἡ ἀνοδος στὸν Γολγοθᾶ, ἐπισφραγίζεται πάντοτε ἀπὸ τὴν Ἀνάστασιν!

Ἀγαπητοί μου ἀδελφοί,

Ὁ φετινὸς ἐορτασμὸς τῆς Υψώσεως τοῦ Τιμίου Σταυροῦ ἔρχεται σὲ μιὰ περιόδο πραγματικά σταυρική καὶ σταυρωμένη γιὰ ὅλο τὸν κόσμο. Ἐρχεται ὁμως παράλληλα νὰ μᾶς γεμίσει μὲ πίστη, ἐλπίδα καὶ αἰσιοδοξία γιὰ ἕνα καλύτερο αὑρίο. «Σταυρός ψύθαι σήμερον, καὶ κόσμος ἀγαίνεται». Γιὰ νὰ ἐλθεῖ ἕνα καλύτερο αὑρίο πρέπει μὲ τὴν Χάρη τοῦ Σταυροῦ νὰ ἀγιάσουμε τὶς ζωὲς μας, νὰ μετανοήσουμε, νὰ ἀλλάξουμε τρόπο σκέψης καὶ νὰ συνειδητοποιήσουμε ὅτι μόνο μὲ τὴν βοήθεια τοῦ Θεοῦ, διὰ τοῦ Τιμίου Σταυροῦ, μποροῦμε νὰ νικήσουμε τὴν μάχη τῆς σταυρικῆς ζωῆς καὶ νὰ κληρονομήσουμε τὴν Βασιλεία τῶν Ὀὐρανῶν.

Κάθε χρόνο, γιὰ τὰ τελευταῖα ἐβδομήντα καὶ πλέον χρόνια, ἡ Ἱερὰ Μητρόπολις Νέας Ἰερσέης τελεῖ κατὰ τὴν ἐορτὴ τοῦ Σταυροῦ τὸν καθαγιασμὸ τῶν Ὑδάτων καὶ τὴν κατάδυση τοῦ Τιμίου Σταυροῦ στὰ νεφά τοῦ Ἀτλαντικοῦ Ὀκεανοῦ, συνεχίζοντας τὴν παράδοση ποὺ καθέρωσε ὡς Ἀρχιεπίσκοπος Βορείου καὶ Νοτίου Ἀμερικῆς ὁ μακαριστὸς Οἰκουμενικὸς Πατριάρχης Ἀθηναγόρας. Ἡ τελετή αὐτὴ ἦταν ἀφιερωμένη στὴν «ἐιρήνη τοῦ σύμπαντος κόσμου», ποὺ ἀποτελεῖ συνεχὴ προσευχὴ τῆς Ὀρθοδοξίας Ἑκκλησίας μας. Δυστυχῶς φέτος, λόγῳ τῆς καταστάσεως, ὁ ἐορτασμός αὐτὸς δὲν ἦταν πραγματοποιηθεὶς, ἀλλὰ σὰς παρακαλῶ νὰ προσευχηθοῦμε ὅλοι, σήμερα καὶ κάθε ἡμέρα, γιὰ τὴν εἰρήνη τοῦ κόσμου μας, γιὰ τὴν εἰρήνη τῶν ψυχῶν μας, γιὰ τὴν ἀπαλλαγή μας ἀπὸ τὸν κίνδυνο τῆς πανδημίας καὶ τὴν ἐπιστροφὴ μας στοὺς συνηθισμένους ρυθμοὺς τῆς ζωῆς μας.

Εὐχόμενος ὅπως ἢ ἀρίττητος καὶ ἀκατάλυτος καὶ θεία δύναμις τοῦ Τιμίου καὶ Ζωοποιοῦ Σταυροῦ σκέπη, εὐλογεῖ καὶ προστατεύει ἐσάς καὶ τὶς οἰκογένειές σας, διατελῶ

Metὰ πατρικῆς ἀγάπης καὶ διαπύρων εὐχῶν

Ο ΜΗΤΡΟΠΟΛΙΤΗΣ

Εὐαγγελος

+ Ο Νέας Ιερσέης ΕΥΑΓΓΕΛΟΣ