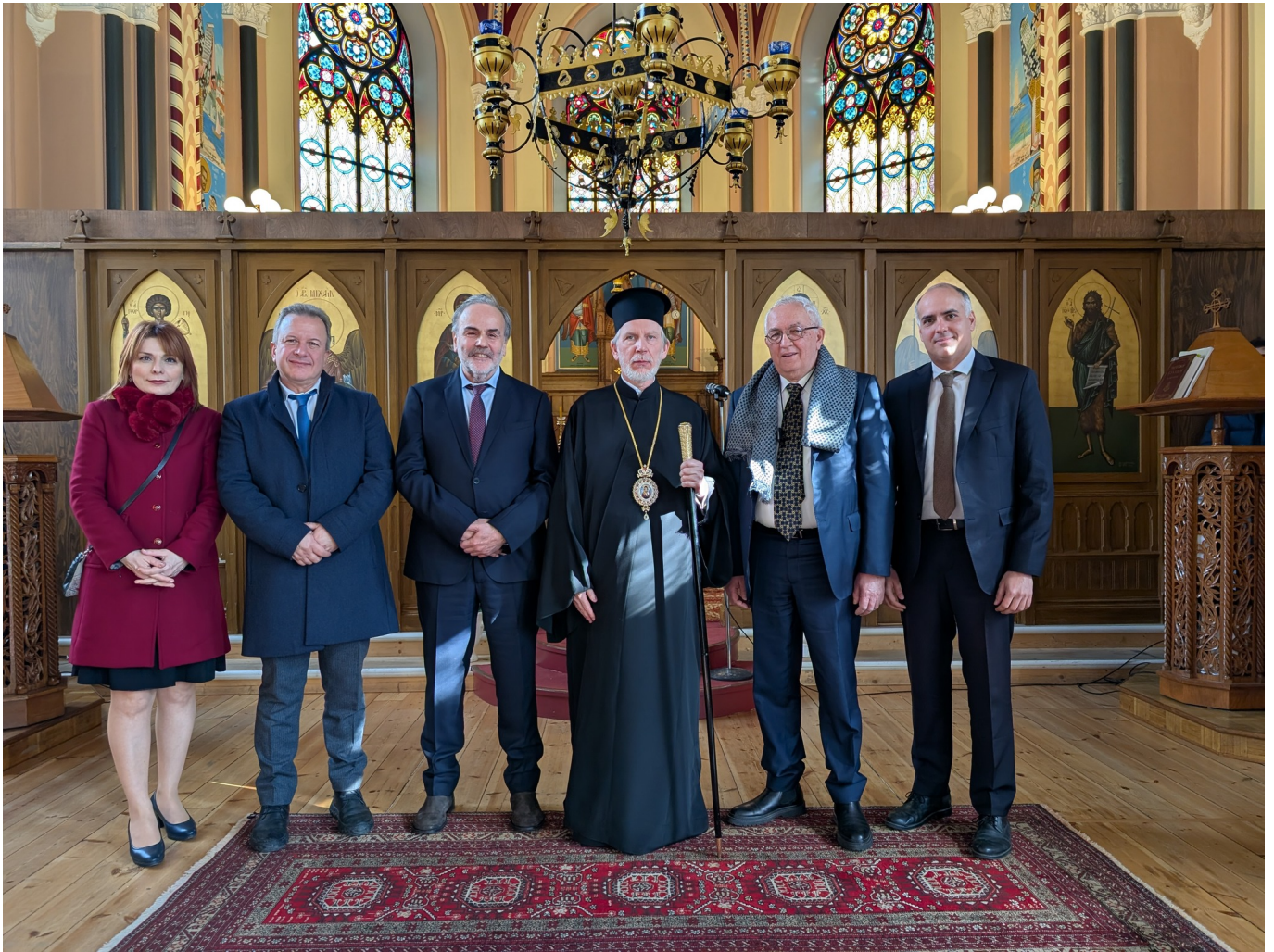


19/03/2025

The Second Sunday of Great Lent at the Stockholm Cathedral



On the Second Sunday of Great Lent, March 16, 2025, when the memory of St. Gregory Palamas, Archbishop of Thessalonica, is celebrated, His Eminence Metropolitan Cleopas of Sweden and All Scandinavia presided over the Divine Liturgy at the St. George Cathedral of Stockholm.

At the end of the Divine Liturgy, the Bishop offered a prayer for the repose of the recently departed Hierarchs, Metropolitan Anthimos former of Thessalonica and Metropolitan Titos former of Paramythia.

Addressing the packed congregation, His Eminence briefly spoke about the theology of Saint Gregory Palamas and the Gospel reading of the healing of the paralytic and the faith of the paralytic and his friends.

In conclusion, he welcomed and introduced the visitors from Greece, Mr. George Pilichos, author of the study “Auschwitz: Greeks – Number of Those Who Were to Die,” and his entourage, Mr. Emmanuel Toufexis, Director of the “Agape Charitable Organization”, and his collaborator, Mrs. Georgia Karasavvidou, both from Thessaloniki, as well as the lawyers from Athens, Mr. Constantine and Mr. Demetrios Sfakianakis.

After welcoming the visitors, His Eminence invited Mr. Pilichos to address the congregation with a brief talk about the Orthodox prisoners in the Auschwitz concentration camp.

In his address, Mr. Pilihos stated the following: “Dear All, In May 2019, our Ecumenical Patriarch, His All-Holiness Bartholomew, walked at the head of 25,000 people along the 4.5 km route from the central Auschwitz camp to the Birkenau extermination camp – a march of remembrance. He was the first Orthodox Patriarch to participate in the “March of the Living,” honoring the memory of the 1,200,000 prisoners who were murdered in this so-called ‘death factory.’ Those people, innocent souls, became ashes and smoke, enduring a brutal and inhuman death – a death no one deserves.

At this sacred place, a vast cemetery the size of 268 football fields, amidst the ruins of the crematoriums, His All-Holiness delivered a speech of peace and hope, which was broadcast by international media, emphasizing the deep need of humanity to be close to God.

Three words stood out in His speech: ‘We are all brothers and sisters.’ These words, so simple and yet so powerful, summarize the essence of our Christian faith. The majority of the murdered, approximately one million people, were Jews. However, Auschwitz was not only a place of martyrdom for them. Among the victims were Christians of all denominations, as well as members of other minorities considered ‘unnecessary’ by the Third Reich.

According to historical records, in addition to the Jews of Greece, Greek Orthodox Christians were also deported to Auschwitz. The Nazis arrested them either because they helped Jews, or because they were deemed resistance members due to their political beliefs, or because they refused to obey orders for forced labor in Germany. Many were sent to Auschwitz for ‘offenses’ or ‘disobedience.’ Their lives in the camp were no different from those of the Jewish prisoners: they suffered the same daily horrors – forced labor, torture, medical experiments, executions.

It is estimated that approximately 20,000 Greeks were sent to Germany for forced

labor.

In the Auschwitz death books, from August 1941 to December 1943, 3,508 deaths of Greek Orthodox and Catholic Christians are recorded. After December 1943, the records were destroyed by the Germans themselves, just before the evacuation of the camp. However, according to historical archives, the total number of Greek Christians who lost their lives in Auschwitz is estimated to be around 7,000 to 7,500 individuals.

The three words of our Ecumenical Patriarch, 'We are all brothers and sisters,' are not just a phrase. They are the essence of our faith. If we followed them in our daily lives and sought to live according to their deep meaning, our world would be very different. The evil 'I/ego,' which lurks within each of us, would not manifest in ways that cause pain and suffering.

As we approach the culmination of the Holy Passion, let us allow these words to guide our thoughts and actions. Not only during these days but every day of our lives.

Your Eminence, I thank you once again for the invitation and the opportunity you have given me to deliver this brief address."

His Eminence thanked and congratulated Mr. Pilihos for his speech, conveyed the paternal blessings of His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, and presented him with the two-volume study of the unpublished correspondence of Saint Nectarios of Pentapolis, published by the "Apostolic Diakonia of the Church of Greece".

A reception followed in honor of the visitors from Greece at the "Museum of Hellenic-Christian Heritage," located at the Cathedral premises.

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