

Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew: “For a state to destroy its own citizens is unacceptable”



His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew presided over the Divine Liturgy on Saturday, July 26, 2025, in celebration of the feast of Saint Paraskevi, the patron saint of Tenedos. The service took place at the historic Church of Saint Paraskevi on the Aegean island.

Among those present were Metropolitan Ioannis of Zambia; Archons of the Great Church of Christ, Athanasios Martinos and Georgios Prokopiou, who also serve as President and Vice President of the Brotherhood of Archons of the Great Church of Christ “Panagia Pammakaristos,” respectively; and several members of the Brotherhood.

Also in attendance were Nikolaos Androulakis, President of PASOK – Movement for Change and Leader of the Opposition in Greece; Ambassador Konstantinos Koutras, Consul General of Greece in Constantinople; Maximos Charakopoulos, Member of the Hellenic Parliament and Secretary General of the Interparliamentary Assembly

on Orthodoxy (I.A.O.), accompanied by his associates; Georgios Koutelakis, Mayor of Nea Smyrni; representatives of the Tenedian and Imbrian associations; as well as numerous Tenedians and friends of the island.

“We came to Tenedos to venerate its holy icon and to ask Saint Paraskevi to protect the island and its inhabitants, the friends of Tenedos, all of you devout pilgrims, and your loved ones,” said Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, addressing the faithful who had gathered in prayer.

He emphasised that the Saints and Martyrs lie at the heart of the Church’s life, expressing its very identity, mission, and hope.

Referring especially to Saint Paraskevi, he described her as “a model of absolute and selfless devotion to Christ the Saviour and His grace.”

The Patriarch also recalled that the Church has designated July as the Month of the Holy Women, noting: “Saint Paraskevi the Martyr continues to stand—today and for future generations of Christians—as a shining symbol of faith, devotion to Christ, and commitment to His commandments. With her courage, she reminds us that before God, ‘there is neither male nor female,’ for ‘you are all one in Christ Jesus’ (cf. Gal. 3:28). Her example is a model for all believers, regardless of gender.”

He went on to highlight the significance of this dedication: “The fact that July, a month during which nearly twenty women saints are commemorated, is recognised as the ‘Month of the Holy Women’ offers a fitting occasion to honor their sacrifices, their witness, and their enduring contribution to the life of the Church, to the family—the ‘little church,’ as my predecessor Saint John Chrysostom called it—to the upbringing of children in the faith, to the preservation of Orthodox tradition, and to the pastoral work of our parishes.”

In his homily, the Patriarch also reflected on the painful history of Imbros and Tenedos in recent decades:

“After the dark year of 1964, when the infamous ‘Dissolution Program’ was put into effect in Imbros and here in Tenedos, difficult years followed for the local population. Our schools were shut down, livelihoods were lost, and a climate of insecurity prevailed.

Only a few faithful remained on the islands—but with perseverance and courage, they kept the churches open: the Church of the Dormition of the Theotokos, the Church of Saint Paraskevi, and the many chapels scattered across Tenedos.”

At another point in his speech, he condemned the policies of the time: “Those who initiated the despicable ‘Dissolution Program’ should be ashamed. For a state to destroy its own citizens is utterly unacceptable.”

Referring once again to the faithful who remained, he concluded: “But their hope did not fade, for they placed their unwavering trust in God’s providence and in their patron, Saint Paraskevi.” They preserved our language and our traditions, and their very presence served as a call to the emigrant Tenedians not to forget their small homeland. From historic Tenedos, their voice echoed to the heavens: ‘If you forget us, who else will remember us?’

Today, there are signs of hope. Tenedos now has its renovated historic church, which will be inaugurated this afternoon. There are encouraging prospects for an increase in the number of expatriates returning to the island. And each year, the feast of Saint Paraskevi stands as both an invitation and a message to the people of Tenedos: that the island and their compatriots await them.

With these feelings and thoughts, we offer our blessing to all the children of martyred Tenedos —those present and celebrating, those living in Nea Tenedos and across the world, who, although physically absent from today’s feast, are here with us in spirit.

We are certain that the souls of all Tenedians—those who once lived in this blessed place, those who came from here and now rest in the cemetery of Tenedos or elsewhere—are praying with us today, in expectation of the resurrection of the dead.

The Tenedians of Bischwiller are certainly here with us, whom I visited not for the first time last January, when I went to Strasbourg, invited to speak at the Interparliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe.

We sincerely thank all of you—the friends of Tenedos and the devout pilgrims—for your presence here today, and we bestow upon you our paternal and patriarchal blessing.”

The Ecumenical Patriarch also expressed heartfelt gratitude to His Eminence Metropolitan Kyrillos of Imbros and Tenedos for his devoted service and pastoral care for the faithful on the island. On the occasion of the five-year anniversary of his ministry in this ecclesiastical province of the Ecumenical Throne, the Patriarch offered his prayer that God may grant him strength to continue his mission. He also warmly welcomed Nikolaos Androulakis, Maximos Charakopoulos, the delegation

from Abkhazia, and all the pilgrims from abroad.

Following the Divine Liturgy, greetings were offered in the courtyard of the church by Metropolitan Kyrillos, PASOK President Nikolaos Androulakis, the President of the Tenedos Association of Athens “Tenes” Panagiotis Okomoussis, and the Mayor of Nea Smyrni.

On the eve of the feast, the Ecumenical Patriarch attended the Vespers service, which was officiated by His Eminence Metropolitan Ioannis of Zambia.

Photographs: Nikos Papachristou

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