

Archiepiscopal Encyclical for Thanksgiving Day 2019



To the Most Reverend Hierarchs, the reverend priests and deacons, the monks and nuns, the Presidents and Members of the Parish Councils of the Greek Orthodox Communities, the distinguished Archons of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, the Day, Afternoon, and Church Schools, the Philoptochos Sisterhoods, the Youth, the Hellenic Organizations, and the entire Greek Orthodox family in America

Beloved brothers and sisters in Christ,

As Orthodox Christians the act of thanksgiving is an expression of our faith that is deeply rooted in our communion with God. We come together in worship as His people to offer a public proclamation of thanksgiving to Him as our Creator and Savior. We celebrate the Holy Eucharist, the holy mystery of thanksgiving in which we receive the Body and Blood of Christ. We give thanks in remembrance of what our Lord has done for our salvation, and we give thanks for the power of His grace through the sacrament.

In our reflection on our faith and thanksgiving in commemoration of Thanksgiving

Day, let us read the words of the Psalmist:

My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.
When shall I come and behold the face of God?
My tears have been my food day and night,
While men say to me continually, "Where is your God?"
These things I remember, as I pour out my soul:
How I went with the throng,
And led them in procession to the house of God,
With glad shouts and songs of thanksgiving,
A multitude keeping festival. (Psalm 42:1-4)

Today is a unique festival in this country, one that has its origins in gratitude to God for safety and freedom, as well as in the plea for divine guidance in a time of national crisis. It is also a day when we as Christians can demonstrate the importance and priority of faith in giving thanks.

As affirmed by the Psalmist, thanksgiving is an act that expresses a longing to be in the presence of God. It is an expression of all of our being—soul, heart, mind and body—that reflects a desire to worship Him and show our gratitude to Him for all that He has done for us. It is an insuppressible and uncompromised action by which we lead others to join us in the house of God to offer songs of thanksgiving!

In the words of the Psalmist, we also see that some will challenge the message of the Gospel and our faith, especially in times of trial. We also know there are many forces in our contemporary world, seeking to remove any reference to God and to faith. This leads to a limited understanding of thanksgiving, one that is void of the relationship of gratitude with the purpose of our lives, and one that is concerned only with meaningless self-gratification. In compassion and truth, we are called to be witnesses of genuine thanksgiving that is offered to the Source of our life, our purposeful existence, and our eternity.

On this blessed Thanksgiving Day, I wish all of you a joyous time of fellowship with friends and family. I give thanks to God for the many ways in which you have and will show compassion to those in need so that they too may give thanks to God. I exhort you on this day to be watchful, stand firm in your faith, be courageous, and be strong. (I Corinthians 16:13) Be witnesses of Almighty God before all, offering words of thanksgiving unto Him for His abundant blessings and promises!

With paternal love in Christ,

† ELPIDOPHOROS

Archbishop of America

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