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Archbishop Elpidophoros of America issues Archiepiscopal Encyclical for the Feast of the Three Hierarchs (2020)



His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros of America has released his Encyclical for this year's Feast of the Three Hierarchs. Read the full text below:

Protocol No. 10/2020
January 30, 2020

Feast of the Three Holy Hierarchs and Ecumenical Teachers
and the Day of Greek Letters

Do nothing from rivalry or conceit,
but in humility count others
more significant than yourselves.
(Philippians 2:3)

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,

On this day we celebrate the Feast of the Three Holy Hierarchs and Ecumenical Teachers: St. Basil the Great, St. Gregory the Theologian and St. John Chrysostom. We name this also as "the Day of Greek Letters." For in this Feast, we honor both the virtues of their hierarchical deaconate, as well as the excellence of their writings. In prayers and liturgies, in homilies and commentaries, in prose and poetry, they employed the panoply of rhetorical arts in the service of Christ and the Church.

But there is a moral lesson in the Feast as well. In the eleventh century, a dispute arose among scholars in Constantinople: Which of these three Fathers was the greatest? Some touted St. John for his Golden Mouth; others favored St. Basil for his sterling character; others promoted St. Gregory for his unparalleled intellect and skillful speech. The disagreement became contentious and counterproductive to the interests of true religion and against the word of God.

The matter was resolved by St. John Mauropous, Metropolitan of Euchaita. In a dream the three Holy Hierarchs appeared to him and spoke as if with a single voice. They declared that among themselves in the Kingdom of God, there is no division and no rivalry—no first or second or third. As shepherds of the Church of Christ, they were and remain equals. They were hierarchs without a hierarchy, each one having served Christ in his own way and to the best of his ability. The Saints instructed that a day of common commemoration should be established, in which the Three Hierarchs would be celebrated jointly and equally, as in fitting for the Church of Christ. Thus, do we celebrate their great Feast on the Thirtieth of January.

As we observe the Day of the Three Holy Hierarchs, we honor them best by imitating their virtues: ways of scholarly excellence, rhetorical power, and purity of thought and word. But we honor them also by following their example of humility and their spirit of Christian equality. With fervor we chant the troparion of the 9th Ode of their Feast's Canon:

There is no second best in these sacred three. Each is thought to be foremost in precedence and to prevail over his co-rivals of equal rank. But rather each with joy has made the success of the other two to be his own as well. There is no room among them to envy one another and thus destroy their unanimity.

This spirit of equality is the way of Christ. It is the life of the Holy Trinity. It is the everlasting glory of the Three Holy Hierarchs and Ecumenical Teachers. Through their intercessions, may Christ our God bless us with the same spirit of humble brotherhood that inspired their holy festival.

With paternal love in Christ,

† ELPIDOPHOROS
Archbishop of America