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# His Eminence Metropolitan Evangelos of New Jersey issues his Encyclical for the Feast of the Three Hierarchs



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**Feast of the Three Hierarchs 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,

The feast of the Three Hierarchs, Saints Basil the Great, Gregory the Theologian, and John Chrysostom, celebrates the memories of three great bishops whose theological, oratorical, hermeneutical, and social contributions represent some of the most significant advances in living and comprehending our Orthodox faith. Their writings, theological concepts, and personal sacrifices to the Church help to give us a glimpse into their unfettered faith, unparalleled intellect, and unmatched character. Were it not for these three great saints, the course of history and theology may not have been as luminous as they were able to explain what no one else could adequately put into words 1,600 years ago.

So fierce was the devotion to these three hierarchs that at the turn of the first millennium, the people of Constantinople found themselves divided into factions each claiming that their preferred hierarch was greater than the others. It was eventually revealed to the populace that none of the hierarchs was greater than the other, but that they were equally deemed great for each had offered to the Church their utmost love and sacrifice. Saint John Chrysostom, who was known for his brilliant oratory, had been exiled from Constantinople on multiple occasions and even died in exile. Saint Gregory the Theologian, whose theological eloquence was instrumental in declaring the divinity of the Holy Spirit, was expelled as Archbishop of Constantinople and President of the 2nd Ecumenical Council. Saint Basil, who is remembered for creating what many would consider the first hospital, was often attacked by his own provincial bishops who placed personal power over ministry.

Each of these hierarchs was willing to give every fiber of his being for the Church and for the people who constitute the Church. Thus, these hierarchs have become for us examples we should emulate. The example of Christian living demonstrated in the lives of the Three Hierarchs is indeed a difficult standard to live up to, but our Lord, knowing our frailty, only asks that we aspire to do more. Though the Lord does not demand that we should all become theologians like Saint Gregory, we should endeavor to learn more about the love and grace of God through reading and studying. Though we may not have the practical means of creating marvelous social ministries like Saint Basil, we should strive to provide food and shelter for our fellow neighbors who find themselves in need. Though we may not have the ability

to be grand orators like Saint John Chrysostom, we should seek to live our Orthodoxy so that our actions become an eloquent sermon unto themselves.

Very few of us are called to be theologians, or orators, or hierarchs, but we are all called to be faithful Orthodox Christians. A part of being an Orthodox Christian is understanding that each of us has a responsibility and a role which is integral to the functioning of the Body of Christ. Each of us has a purpose in life and this purpose is revealed by God through time. As we hear Saint Paul explain to the faithful at Corinth, *"Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? Now eagerly desire the greater gifts" (1 Cor. 12:29-31)*. Therefore, when we hear the call of the Lord asking us to live our faith, we should never be afraid of responding, *"Here am I. Send me!" (Is. 6:8)*

My beloved in the Lord, the blessedness of the Three Hierarchs did not make them immune to adversity, but neither did their adversity prevent them from *"fighting the good fight, running the race, and keeping the faith"*. Their example helps to show us that we must always remain focused on Christ because if we faithfully complete the race, He will raise us up in glory. Praying that the Three Hierarchs continue to guide, embolden, and enlighten each of us so that we may be led to the Everlasting Kingdom of God, I remain

**With Paternal Love and Blessings,**
**† E V A N G E L O S**
**Metropolitan of New Jersey**