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His Eminence Metropolitan Evangelos of New Jersey issues Sunday of Orthodoxy Encyclical



His Eminence Metropolitan Evangelos of New Jersey has released this year's Encyclical for Sunday of Orthodoxy. Read the full text below:

Sunday of Orthodoxy 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,

In the 8th and 9th centuries the Byzantine Empire endured a harsh persecution perpetrated by some of its emperors and certain ecclesiastical figures who had been led astray in their theological conclusions. The persecution concerned the presence and usage of icons in the spiritual lives of Christians. Some of the people at the time believed that the recent military losses suffered by the empire were divine retribution for what was perceived as idolatry. There would subsequently be a series of emperors who persecuted Patriarchs, other clergy, monastics, and laity alike who held firmly to the tradition of using imagery in their spiritual lives.

As we well know, however, the usage of imagery in our spiritual lives is neither contrary to Holy Scripture nor to the tradition of the Church. This is because we, as Orthodox Christians, do not worship icons – we venerate icons. It was precisely this controversy which begat the 7th Ecumenical Council at Nicaea in 787. The Fathers of the Council determined that we can depict icons because of the Incarnation of Christ in which God revealed Himself to us giving full meaning to the Biblical verse, *“Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness”* (Genesis 1:26).

Thus, on this day we celebrate a feast wherein we affirm the faith of the Apostles, the faith of the Fathers, and the faith which has established the universe. In affirming our faith and the timeless truths which have been passed down to us, we affirm and defend our Orthodoxy. We defend our faith not as Greeks nor as Russians; not as Arabs nor as Serbs; neither as Romanians nor as Americans. As Orthodox Christians, we defend the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church, undivided and undefiled.

As the united Body of Christ, we are called not just to keep the faith of the Church within our hearts, but to express this faith through our works. This is why at all times we must seek to feed the hungry, shelter the poor, help the destitute, and defend the defenseless. We do these things not because society expects us to do them, but because we respect the personhood of each and every person since we recognize that each person is made in the image and likeness of God.

This is also why it is essential to acknowledge and support the crucial work of the Philoptochos Sisterhood of the Greek Orthodox Metropolis of New Jersey. Your support is essential for the Philoptochos Sisterhood to make a difference in the lives of countless persons who need the help of this Sisterhood. A special offering tray will be passed today in all Parishes of our Metropolis so you can actively participate in this Lenten season by aiding the poor through generous giving. May this Holy and Great Lent bring you many blessings, love, humility, patience, kindness, and every good virtue that we need for our salvation as we journey together to our Lord’s glorious Resurrection from the dead.

With Paternal Love and Blessings,

† E V A N G E L O S

Metropolitan of New Jersey