29/05/2020

His Eminence Metropolitan Evangelos of New Jersey issues Encyclical on Fall of Constantinople



Commemoration of Constantinople 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 fall of Constantinople on May 29, 1453 to the Ottoman Turks is an event that is burnt into the collective memory of Orthodox Christians everywhere throughout the world. On that day, our Queen City was taken, our Emperor was martyred, and our people subjected to brutalities for centuries to come. The events that transpired on that fateful day and in the following centuries can never and should never be forgotten by Orthodox Christians and especially by those of us who share in the venerable Byzantine cultural heritage. For nearly 600 years our forefathers, who ardently strived to preserve their faith and culture, were systematically and increasingly oppressed as the Turkish response to the existence of Orthodox Christians and persons of Greek heritage had increasingly become more severe. Genocide, cultural subjugation, the suppression of basic human rights, and the continued oppression of our Mother Church, the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, have been the hallmarks of the Turkish legacy stretching into these contemporary times.

One of the most abhorrent and vile threats which continuously emanate from Turkish fanatics and fundamentalists is their desire and overt actions to convert the august Agia Sophia into a mosque. This despicable rhetoric has only served to intimidate the Orthodox Christian Community of Constantinople while trying to rile up antiChristian sentiments among fundamentalist groups. Moreover, these types of comments and pronouncements only further hinder the steps taken by sensible leaders who have striven to foster an atmosphere of peaceful coexistence and mutual respect.

At the center of this struggle is our beloved Ecumenical Patriarchate ofConstantinople, the center of Orthodoxy, which has always stood at the forefront of peace and has, since the beginning, promulgated the peace and love expressed in the Gospel of Christ. The Ecumenical Patriarchate’s struggles throughout these

many centuries has seen it time and time again oppressed, deprived of basic rights, and held hostage to the unjust actions of the Turkish state. Yet, through all these centuries of oppression and being subjected to cruelty, our Mother Church has unceasingly radiated the Sacred Light of Christ. Our cherished Ecumenical Patriarchate and our Spiritual Father, His AllHoliness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, have been on the front lines fighting against racism, bigotry, and intolerance wherever it has reared its horrid head and has led the fight to restore justice, to preserve human dignity, and to protect religious freedom everywhere. The Ecumenical Patriarchate has always had a message of love and peace, a message it still expresses to this very day.

As we mourn the loss of our Queen City today, let us also remain cognizant that even after almost six centuries, after the tortures and oppression, the threats and the slavery, and the violence and the martyrdoms, our Holy Mother Church still remains. Let us never lose faith, never lose hope, and never stop fighting the good fight. Let us always stand faithfully and fervently in support of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, the Mother of all Orthodoxy, and defend her in the face of the continued threats she endures at the hands of the Turkish state. Praying that the Theotokos perpetually guards and protects her City and keeps both our beloved Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Church of Agia Sophia safe from all adversities, I remain,

With Paternal Love and Blessings,

† E V A N G E L O S
Metropolitan of New Jersey

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