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His Eminence Metropolitan Gerasimos of San Francisco – Reflection on Saint Euphemia the Great Martyr

When you visit the Ecumenical Patriarchate, the Phanar in Constantinople, a centerpiece of your time there is to visit the Church of Saint George the Great Martyr. This church is the fifth church in Constantinople to house the Ecumenical Patriarchate since the fall of the City in 1453. The church is, first and foremost, a house of prayer, where His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew regularly celebrates the Divine Services. The church has also been the site for many historic events, including meetings of the Primates of the Orthodox Church, and the visits of various Popes, including Pope Benedict and Pope Francis.

Along the walls of the church, you can venerate the relics of numerous saints. Many times, we rush to the north side of the church to venerate the relics of the Three Great Hierarchs of our Church, Basil the Great, Gregory the Theologian, and John Chrysostom. However, I would like to turn your attention to the other side of the church, behind the Patriarchal throne. There you will find the relics of three female saints, one of them being Saint Euphemia the Great Martyr.

On September 16 we commemorate the martyrdom of Saint Euphemia. And on July

11, we remember the great miracle that she performed at the Fourth Ecumenical Council in 451 AD. Saint Euphemia was martyred in 303 AD because she refused to sacrifice to a pagan god. Her relics eventually found their way to Chalcedon, just outside Constantinople. During the Fourth Ecumenical Council, held in Chalcedon, the debate over the humanity and divinity of Jesus was very contentious. The two sides eventually placed their positions about this matter on Saint Euphemia's chest in her tomb. Three days later, when they returned and re-opened the tomb, the Orthodox position was found in her hand, while the non-Orthodox position was found at her feet. Through the intervention of the saint, the teachings of our Church were defined.

As a Church, we rely on the witness of the saints. In their lives, many of them were great teachers and exponents of the Orthodox Christian faith. For example, we call the Three Hierarchs the great ecumenical teachers, meaning that they taught the entire world. Saint Euphemia is an example of how the intervention of the saints in their deaths also became our teachers and exponents of our Faith. Her miraculous intervention at the Council of Chalcedon, so many centuries ago, ended a contentious debate and upheld the doctrine of the Church about Jesus Christ. When we say and teach that Jesus is one person in two natures, we are using the Confession of Chalcedon. When you teach your children to hold their two fingers on their palms when they make the Sign of the Cross as a sign of the two natures of Jesus, you are teaching the Confession of Chalcedon. When we say that these two natures are "without confusion, without change, without division, and without separation" we are using the same Confession. Through the intervention of Saint Euphemia at the Council, this Confession became the expression of our Faith.

The Church continues to debate many issues in its life. Our Ecumenical Patriarchate guides our Church surrounded by the relics of saints such as Saint Euphemia and the others at the Church of Saint George. We must continue to pray to the saints for guidance, for they continue to teach us through their writings, like the Fathers of the Church, or their examples of intervention, such as the miracle of the praiseworthy Saint Euphemia.

Hronia Polla to all those who bear the name of the venerable Saint Euphemia, and may she intercede for us in her fervent prayers before the Lord. God bless you!

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