

12/09/2020

His Eminence Metropolitan Evangelos of New Jersey issues Encyclical on the occasion of the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross



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,

As we celebrate the universal exaltation of the Precious and Life-Giving Cross, we have the opportunity to reflect on how our Lord's self-sacrificial decision to be crucified for the life of the world transformed all of creation. Although encountering the crucified Christ fills us with sorrow as we see Him in agony outstretched on the Cross, it was through this act that joy and salvation came to all the world and newness of life was granted to all creation. It is this paradox which uniquely sets us apart from other faiths and which confounds those who are unwilling to understand the glory of God. Joy came through the Cross even though, at the time, the Cross was associated with violence. The Cross bore the fruit of life, even though it was associated with death. In the centuries that have passed since our Lord's crucifixion, the image of the Cross has been transformed from being a violent method of execution, to being emblematic of life, joy, and salvation. Indeed, the Cross has uplifted and supported generations of saints, clergy, ascetics, and faithful Orthodox Christians who have found comfort in it and who wear it faithfully as a reminder of our love and devotion to Christ and to His Church.

The Lord's example, however, and His own words remind us that we are to endure our own struggles in order that we may dwell with Him in His everlasting Kingdom. Christ tells us, ***"If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it"*** (Matt. 16:24-25). We are called to follow the Lord by taking up our own Crosses and, in this way, we may become worthy of eternal life. The burden of each person's Cross is different, each according to the will of God. Moreover, there are some Crosses that we bear as a Community. In order to be recipients of the joy the Cross brings and beneficiaries of the eternal life the Cross grants, we must take on the responsibility of bearing both our personal and our communal Crosses. Therefore, I encourage you to come to the Divine Services, partake of the Body and Blood of Christ, engage in the Church's ministries, and help to build up the Body of Christ once more so that we may continue the Church's mission of helping those in need.

During these last several months in which we have endured the harshness of the Coronavirus Pandemic, we have witnessed families, friends, and neighbors

adversely affected whether by being afflicted with the virus themselves or suffering the reverberating consequences wrought by the economy. Even more so, the Church and its ministries have endured setbacks as churches were closed for months at the beginning of the Pandemic and Parish Communities are unable to continue many of their ministries.

Most lamentably, the annual Feast of the Holy Cross Celebration and Blessing of the Waters which has traditionally taken place every year in Asbury Park since 1947, is unable to be held this year due to the Pandemic. This celebration, which was instituted by Ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras when he was Archbishop of North and South America, sought to bring everyone together in prayer for the peace of the world which had just endured the Second World War. Although we will not have the opportunity to be present in Asbury Park this year for the Holy Cross Celebration and Blessing of the Waters, we all should nevertheless pray with all our mind, soul, and strength for the peace of the world and for an end to the Coronavirus Pandemic which has afflicted us for these past several months.

My beloved in the Lord, let us commit ourselves to increased prayer and dedication to Christ and His Church, recognizing that the trials and tribulations we presently endure are temporary, but the life our Lord offers us is everlasting. Let us wear our Cross and make the sign of the Cross, no matter where we are, with joy and without fear. Finally, may we always keep the Cross at the forefront of our spiritual lives remembering the words of St. Paul, ***“If we have been united with Him in a death like His, we will certainly also be united with Him in a resurrection like His”*** (Rom. 6:5). Praying that you may be guarded and guided by the power of the Precious and Life-giving Cross,

I remain

With Paternal Love and Blessings,

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