

Ecumenical Patriarch: “It is necessary to support parents, students and teachers and to ensure free and equal access to quality online education for all”



Address on the occasion of the celebration of the memory of the Three Hierarchs in the Phanar

The memory of the Three Hierarchs and “Patrons of Letters” was honored with special solemnity at the Holy Center of the First-Throned Church of Constantinople today, Friday, January 29, 2021, one day early, as travel restrictions apply during the weekend as part of coronavirus precautions.

His All-Holiness the Ecumenical Patriarch presided from the Throne at the Divine Liturgy celebrated at the All-Holy Patriarchal Church, concelebrated by Their Eminences the Metropolitans Apostolos, Geron of Derkon, Meliton of Philadelphia,

Irenaios of Myriophytos and Peristasis, Chrysostomos of Myra, Stefanos of Kallioupolis and Madytos, Athenagoras of Kydonia, Maximos of Silyvria, Bartholomew of Smyrna and Vissarion of Spain and Portugal.

The sermon of the day was delivered by His Eminence Metropolitan Theoleptos of Iconium.

Also present in the church were His Eminence Metropolitan Gennadios of Sassima; Archons Offikion of the Holy Great Church of Christ; the Coordinator of Education at the Consulate General of Greece in Istanbul, Mr. Ioannis Gigourtsis, on behalf of the Consul General; the administrators, the school principal and the teachers of the Great Patriarchal School of the Genos, teachers from other Greek Schools, as well as faithful from Istanbul.

After the end of the Divine Liturgy, the Ecumenical Patriarch prayed, as he does every year, the Trisagion for the repose of the souls of the late founders, benefactors, superintendents, headmasters, professors, teachers, officials and students of the Great School of the Genos.

In his address, the Ecumenical Patriarch emphasized that today's double celebration "is an opportunity to confess and renew our unwavering faith and, in our other duty, to preserve undisturbed and ever-strong the link between Church and School, liturgical life and education, altar and home, which is our long-standing tradition."

His All-Holiness then emphasized:

"In the creation of this unique tradition, the Three Hierarchs contributed decisively, who, along with theology, also loved and studied ancient Greek letters, which they made available to sacred science.

"In the past, there was no separation of Church and Education, but complementarity and coexistence. The school was located within the courtyard of the church. For many centuries, after preschool education at the knee of the mother, the first school classrooms were the narthexes of churches and the hermitages of educated monks, while zealous clerics, encompassing 'every city and country,' taught, preached, strengthened, opened schools, and made up for the deficiencies of the education of the Genos.

"In elementary education, the first book was the psalter. Reading was done with rhythm and psalm, and this, according to the recommendations of Christian educators, was done in order to make the lesson enjoyable, since psalmody is

‘tranquility of mind, the award of peace, worship among friends and the safety of children.’ This is why in Cappadocia the word ‘psallisko’ [I go to Psalms] was used instead of ‘I go to school.’”

Recalling that the city was, during the Byzantine era, the most important spiritual center, the Ecumenical Patriarch pointed out that the Church today still shows its strong interest in education and youth.

“But because we must not rest only on the sacrifices and achievements of past generations, the Church continues today, as much as possible, to show a lively and practical interest in the education of youth and for the foundation of education on a sound basis, and is profoundly sorrowful when she finds an attempt to break the bonds of Christian tradition and education.

“And the Holy Great Church of Christ, more than any other Church, has the right to honor the present feast of the Letters, because it has always, under favorable conditions and under unfavorable circumstances, through many hardships, sacrifices and toils, safeguarded the torch of education in the manner of our fathers, ‘more valuable than money,’ in parallel with the torch of faith and piety. And the Mother Church did this because she knew ‘the power of education to what is relevant,’ according to the saying of Basil the Great, and found in her and her ministers valuable helpers in the fulfillment of its saving mission.”

His All-Holiness made a special reference to the importance of the function of teachers, who together with the family and the Church, ‘cultivate — and should cultivate — the souls of their students and elevate them closer to the Throne of God.’ He did not fail to mention the difficulties faced by teachers, especially during this period of the pandemic.

“We know how difficult the job of a teacher is, as society often does not recognize his sacrifice and either reacts to him with the bitterness of ignorance or wrongs him, depriving him of the necessary means for the meaningful exercise of his duties. And the severe pandemic of the coronavirus made these difficulties more acute not only for teachers, but also for students, due to the necessity of turning education in person into distance learning. Thanks to the use of new technologies, our children can continue their lessons online. However, the shift to home education has highlighted both the inequality of access to it for many students who do not have the required technological equipment or internet connection, as well as the general risk of lessening the sense of the importance of the personal relationship and cooperation between teacher and student, and of the school environment as well, as for the crucial importance of the socialization of the new

generation.

“Today, more than ever, it is necessary to support parents, students and teachers in their mission, and to ensure free and equal access to quality online education for all. When we say that children are the future, we must not forget that they also have a present, that they have their own rights, here and now, today. Therefore, when drawing up recovery plans from the pandemic, care must be taken that the coronavirus-resistant new generation does not pay a heavy price in the long run, due to the social and economic consequences of this crisis.”

Previously, Athanasios Angelidis, Archon Primikirios of the Holy Great Church of Christ and President of the Board of the Great Patriarchal School of the Genos, addressed His All-Holiness.

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