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Encyclical of Archbishop Sotirios of Canada for March 25th, Independence Day of Greece



MARCH 2021

Reverend Fathers, Honourable Presidents and Esteemed Members of the Boards of Directors, Members of the Philoptochos Societies, Teachers, Students and Youth Members of the Communities, and to the Entire Plenitude of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Canada

On the Dual Annunciations

Archbishop Sotirios of Canada

Paradise. Beautiful, illumined, peaceful, serene. A true family atmosphere. God Is the Father. Adam and Eve are the children. In the afternoon, God descends to gather with Adam and Eve. They take their walks together. He teaches them the whole truth. There is no greater joy.

Satan is jealous. He is the real devil. He tries to spoil the beautiful atmosphere, to destroy the tranquility of the family. He puffs up Eve's ego. And she decides to follow him. She takes his advice. She eats from the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Through her selfishness, she loses everything. She also persuades Adam to do the same. They begin to feel completely naked. They hide from God. In the afternoon, God looks to find them. He calls out: Adam, Adam, where are you? They try to hide their nakedness. They try to find excuses. But the light is lost. The day draws to a close. Darkness covers everything. As exiles, they begin to wander the earth. They stay that way for years. For centuries. For millennia. Who knows how long!

A ray of sunshine is coming. "Rejoice, Mary full of grace. The Lord is with you." The Archangel Gabriel brings forth the good news. He announces the coming of the Saviour. Humankind's return to paradise commences.

The Byzantine Empire leads the way. Greek philosophy and the light of Christ guide the course of humanity for 1,000 years.

The 29th of May 1453 arrives. The City falls. The emperor turns to stone. The liturgy is interrupted. The innocent are drenched in blood. The Great Church of the Hagia Sophia (dedicated to the Holy Wisdom of God) is converted to a mosque. The light is lost. A black veil of darkness envelops all. Christians are enslaved. For 400 years, the obscurantism of Turkey and Islam covers everything. Terror and slavery dominate. The Christians and Greeks suffer greatly.

"I tell you mother, I can no longer work for the Turk. I can't anymore, I can no longer do it, my heart grows weary, I will take my rifle, and join the fight for freedom in the mountains." But how? They are barefoot. They are illiterate. They are ragged and scruffy. They have almost nothing at all. They do not have money. They do not have weapons. But they have a soul. They have faith in God. They have the true faith. It all begins with the members of the secret *Filiki Eteria* (the Society of Friends). They swear, "Freedom or Death." "For the holy faith of Christ, for the freedom of the homeland." The miracle takes place. No one could believe it. Freedom returns once more to beautiful Greece. Other nations follow suit. They rise up. It takes many years, but they gain their freedom.

We celebrate the dual annunciations. The Annunciation of the Conception of Christ and the Annunciation of the freedom of Greece. Whatever we do in Canada, Greek blood runs through our veins. The truth of Christ dwells in our souls. We are Greeks and Orthodox Christians. A people honored with a very ancient and glorious past. A

people enlightened with the holy faith of Christ. What is our duty? To follow the wise teachings of our ancient ancestors which have been fused with the truth of Christ. To learn from the bravery and valour of the heroes of the Greek revolution of 1821. To live in a Greek and Christian manner. And if we cannot celebrate this year with services and doxologies and parades because of the coronavirus, let us not lose our spirit. It is a storm and it will pass. The coronavirus will be crushed. It will disappear. By the grace of God, everything will be overcome. But we need to remain faithful and not to lose courage with the difficult conditions created by the coronavirus. We need to live out our Orthodox faith. To do good works. To look after our souls as well. To think about the afterlife and our return to paradise. To admire and integrate with the spirit of our ancient Greek ancestors. To follow the example and achievement of the heroes of the Greek Revolution. To live in peace and be productive. Long live the Greek Revolution of 1821! Long live Greece! Long live Canada! Long live Freedom!

With fatherly love and blessings,

ARCHBISHOP SOTIRIOS

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