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Encyclical of His Eminence Archbishop Demetrios, Geron of America



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To the Most Reverend Hierarchs, the Reverend Priests and Deacons, the Monks and Nuns, the Presidents and Members of the Parish Councils of the Greek Orthodox Communities, the Distinguished Archons of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, the Day, Afternoon, and Church Schools, the Philoptochos Sisterhoods, the Youth, the Hellenic Organizations, and the entire Greek Orthodox Family in America

Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Χριστὸς Ἀνέστη! Christ is Risen!

Following the Apostolic injunction of *speaking the truth in love* (Ephesians 4:15), I

have today the great honor to communicate with you in a spirit of truth and love, in order to share with you some important items related to the life and progress in Christ of our holy Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America.

By the blessing of God, twenty years ago, I received the singular honor of being elected Archbishop of America by our Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew and the Holy and Sacred Synod of our Ecumenical Patriarchate.

On September 18, 1999, in my enthronement address I emphasized the necessity of cultivating three very important areas. First, the cultivation and growth of our Orthodox faith which our Ecumenical Patriarchate has preserved intact and immaculate. Second, the establishment of a spirit and action of love, charity, and care for the human being, without any limitation, discrimination or reservation. And third, the promotion of unbreakable unity, concord, and unanimity of our ecclesiastical body, and of our Greek Orthodox Community in general, remembering what the Lord prayed to His Father, *that they may all be one; even as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be one in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me* (John 17:21).

For twenty years, through an intense effort to cover the multifaceted spiritual, educational and cultural needs of our Archdiocese, I have tried, in cooperation with the grace of God to remain faithful to the aforementioned aims of Faith, Love, and Unity. In addition, major themes related to the important diptych of Orthodoxy and Hellenism such as the religious freedom of our Ecumenical Patriarchate, the tragedy of the foreign occupation of Cyprus, and the Macedonian issue, have also been areas of our concern and action. All of the above have been realized through strong and substantive cooperation with the distinguished and beloved brother hierarchs, pious priests, deacons, monks, and nuns, the dedicated lay people of the major organizations of the holy Archdiocese and the Omogenia, and with the impressive contribution and help of the more than 500 parishes in America. An integral part of this twenty-year effort has been the unfailing care and support in every way of our Ecumenical Patriarchate.

It must be earnestly noted that such an undertaking extending over a twenty-year period has gone through various challenges, unpredictable difficulties, unjust attacks and actions by various people, something that has been happening to the Church from its inception to our own times. In every case, I have remembered daily what St. Paul said that, *a great and effective door has opened to me, and there are many opponents* (1 Corinthians 16:9), and also the text from the Book of Revelation, *Behold, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut* (Revelation 3:8). Glory and honor and thanksgiving belong to the almighty and

merciful God, Who did not allow for us to be crushed, but on the contrary, He granted us the gift of having among us inspiring examples of many faithful clergy and laity who remained strong and dedicated to God in spite of all difficulties.

Such a long and intense undertaking certainly was not free from human mistakes and possible wrong actions. I express my sincere sorrow for all of them, accompanied by the assurance that any mistakes and wrong actions were not the result of bad intent, indifference or selfishness. If I have caused pain to any, I ask for forgiveness; while from my heart I offer forgiveness to anyone who caused pain to me.

And now, having the very great blessing of reaching the twentieth year of my diakonia as Archbishop, and by the grace of God running the course of the 92nd year of my long life, and keeping in mind the Biblical counsel from the Book of Ecclesiastes that, *There is a time for everything under heaven* (Ecclesiastes 3:1), I thought it appropriate and timely to place at the disposal and discretion of our Ecumenical Patriarch and the Holy and Sacred Synod of our Ecumenical Patriarchate my resignation. At the same time, I am praying that my successor in the holy throne of the Archbishop of America will receive in abundance the grace and power of the Crucified and Risen Lord, so that he will be able to realize important and sacred work in America; and specifically, in continuing and completing the construction of the historic Church and National Shrine of St. Nicholas in New York, and for the building up of our Hellenic College and Holy Cross Greek School of Theology in Brookline, MA.

In my new status, I will have the opportunity to dedicate ample time to prayer: prayer not only for you, my beloved brothers and sisters and for the holy Archdiocese of America, but also for the Omogenia, for our Ecumenical Patriarchate, and for all people finding themselves under difficulties, torments and tragic conditions.

As I bring to a close now and look back over the long span of my theological and ecclesiastical diakonia in the United States, I offer glory and praise and thanksgiving to God for the honor and love you have displayed abundantly to my person. And in all humility, but also in clear conscience, I repeat the beautiful confession of St. Paul, *I have fought the good fight, I have completed the course, I have kept the faith* (2 Timothy 4:7).

You and your noble families have my continuous and warmest prayers for abundant grace from God, for joyful progress and fulfillment in all aspects of your lives and endeavors, and for your fully enjoying the magnificent biblical blessing, *The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you. The Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace*

(Numbers 6:24-26).

With paternal love and highest esteem in Christ, our Crucified and Risen Lord and God,

† D E M E T R I O S

Archbishop of America