

A Reflection for October 28

OXI Day



Every year Greek Orthodox Christians take pride in the commemoration of October 28, which we know as "OXI Day." As a people joined by a common faith with those brave Greek patriots of the Second World War, we also celebrate the courage and steadfastness of a nation that said "NO" to fascism, "NO" to injustice, and "NO" to slavery. Every successive generation of Orthodox Christians gives thanks to God, therefore, when they extol the glorious memory of the Twenty-Eighth of October.

For the generation who lived through that momentous time, however, "OXI Day" is more than a memory. The passage of seventy years has not in the least dimmed the recollection of these events, and the urgency and immediacy of that day remain fresh in their minds for life. All across Greece on that fateful morning in 1940, a sound went up throughout all of the cities and towns, the sound of sirens and claxons. Walls that before had echoed only with the tolling of the church bells now reverberated with the din of alarms. Under any circumstances, this eerie and unearthly wailing would have had an unnerving effect, and all the more at a time when Europe was descending into the inferno of another world war.

But on October 28, 1940 the people of Greece did not panic. Men went calmly to their closets and retrieved their military uniforms. Women went about their necessary tasks, and the children assisted as they were able. With levelheaded determination, the citizenry of Greece mobilized against the coming invaders. With steadfast resolve, the government of Greece delivered their resounding "NO!" to the Axis aggressors.

This example of "poise under pressure" is one of the finest treasures of the Hellenic heritage and is at the heart of the legacy of "OXI Day." There can be no doubt about it: the people of Greece on October 28, 1940 chose the harder path in taking the way of resistance. Had they opened the gates to the invaders, much bloodshed and many deprivations would have been avoided. That brave generation, though, refused to submit to oppression, even at the cost of their homes, their land, and their lives. Theirs was an act of self-sacrifice that clearly proclaimed the humanitarian ideals of their Orthodox Christian faith. Not only so, but by delaying the Axis onslaught in the Balkan Peninsula, the Greek nation which said "OXI" contributed to the eventual downfall of the Fascist powers in Europe. They chose to fight and even to die so that their children and the children of other nations might live in liberty.

For this reason, we, both as Americans and as Orthodox Christians, cherish the memory of "OXI Day" with doxologies and celebrations. For us, the Twenty-Eighth of October, 1940 is not merely a memory ... but rather something far more. OXI Day is the embodiment of the ideals of the Christian life: "Greater love has no man than this that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). In the simple words and brave actions of Christian Greece, we see all of the highest virtues of sanctified human nature revealed: passion for justice, courage in the time of trial, unity in the midst of conflict, and willingness to offer up oneself for the good of others. Every time a Christian stands up against evil on behalf of another, OXI Day happens all over again. Therefore, we pray that we might also be brave warriors for the good, and so be worthy heirs throughout our lives of the legacy of "OXI Day." May the Lord bless our celebration of October 28 and seal its example in our souls forever!

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