



## ANNUNCIATION GREEK ORTHODOX CATHEDRAL

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My Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I pray this message finds you all well and healthy.

On February 7th we celebrate the feast day of St. Luke the Righteous who was born in Greece to poor parents in 896 A.D. From his early childhood he had an inclination towards asceticism in the way of prayer, fasting and almsgiving. When his father passed away, he entered a monastery in the region of Athens and received the small habit. A short time afterwards he went to live as a hermit on a deserted mountain called Ioannou, where a church of the holy Unmercenaries Cosmas and Damian was located. There he dedicated himself to a very strict ascetic life praising the Lord and received the great habit while living there. Because of the invasion of the Magyars, Bulgarians and Saracens, he had to move many times from one hermitage to another. Wherever he went he followed the same strict, monastic lifestyle, dedicating himself fully to our Trinitarian God. Because of his loyalty and obedience to God's Divine and Holy Will, he was granted the grace of performing miracles, such as healing the sick of all types of diseases, both bodily and spiritual. After falling ill, St. Luke departed peacefully from this life on February 7th, 946 A.D., saying "Into thy hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit!" At the site of his relics, two churches and the Monastery of Hosios Loukas were built, which remain until today as one of the major pilgrimage destinations for the faithful seeking his intercessory prayers.

On February 8th we celebrate the feast day of St. Theodore the Commander and Great Martyr. St. Theodore was born in Euchaita of Galatia and lived during the end of 3rd century and early 4th century. St. Theodore joined the military service from his youth and because of his strong ethos and physical abilities he became a commander of the Roman military. He was a Christian and when the authorities found out, he was asked to worship the idols. When he was granted his request to take home the idols adorned with gold and silver under the pretense that he wished to look after them and honor them the next morning, he, instead, broke them into pieces and, during the night, distributed the gold and silver to the poor and needy citizens of Pontus. When a centurion reported that he saw pieces of the idols in the hands of paupers, St. Theodore was arrested and punished with various tortures, both before and after his crucifixion. When he was found alive and whole the next day, many pagans and Roman soldiers believed in Christ. As a result of his brave witness and love for our Savior, which turned many to believe in our Trinitarian God, he was beheaded. His martyric blood became a blessing and cleansing for Christians at that time, and today he is known as a sleepless Saint who intercedes unceasingly for us for the salvation of our souls.

On February 10th we celebrate the feast day of St. Haralambos the Holy Martyr. St. Haralambos was born at the end of the 1st century and martyred at the start of the 3rd century. He held the position of priest in Magnesia of Asia Minor. When an edict was issued against the Christians, he did not fear persecution and, like a true shepherd of Christ's flock, he openly preached the Christian faith. He was 113 years old when he was

arrested and brought before the Governor when he boldly proclaimed his faith in Jesus Christ. Despite his old age, he was not afraid to undergo bodily torments. When St. Haralambos chose the martyrlic path for the glory of our Trinitarian God, tortured and tormented, after suffering many martyrdoms, he was beheaded for the glory of God. St. Haralambos is one of the greatest priests and Hieromartyrs of our Orthodox Church. He is well-known for his miraculous assistance for those who seek his intercessory prayers in times of need.

On February 11th we celebrate the feast day of St. Theodora the Empress, who was the wife of iconoclast Byzantine Emperor Theophilus. She was born in 815 A.D. in the city of Edessa in Paphlagonia and reposed in the Lord in 867 A.D. at the age of 52. She was married at 15 years old and lived during the years of the iconoclast dispute, which her husband, the emperor, supported. Despite her husband's stance, St. Theodora secretly continued to venerate the icons. After her husband's death, she governed the empire for 15 years, because her son Michael was still too young to do so. On March 11<sup>th</sup> of 843 A.D. she called together the annual ecclesiastical Synod of Constantinople during which iconoclast dispute was resolved and the veneration of icons was reinstated (according decree of the Seventh Ecumenical Council on this matter), Patriarch John VII was deposed and St. Methodios the Confessor was enthroned. Unfortunately, her brother Bardas led an immoral life and he negatively influenced St. Theodora's son Michael, leading him to displace his mother from her role in governance when he came of age. As a result, St. Theodora, along with her five daughters, was sent to live in a female monastery in Constantinople. There, she lived an ascetic life until she reposed in the Lord. St. Theodora's patience, love, humility and dedication to our Trinitarian God earned her rest with the Saints, and she continues to help us miraculously when we pray for her intercessory prayers.

Let us all admire the steadfast uprightness and loyalty that St. Luke the Righteous had towards our Trinitarian God, who lived an ascetic life despite being periodically displaced by invasions. Let us all imitate the philanthropic almsgiving of St. Theodore the Commander and Great Martyr, as well as his Christian love, faith and boldness. Let us ask St. Haralambos the Holy Martyr's intercessions to defeat our bodily passions and live our everyday lives in the teachings of the living Word of God, as described in the Holy Gospel. And let us all venerate the holy icons, as did St. Theodora the Empress, with faith, love and reverence, where by God's Grace, they serve us, as a spiritual portal to the heavenly life and the Kingdom of God.



Rev. Economist Fr. Georgios Manias

