



ANNUNCIATION GREEK ORTHODOX CATHEDRAL

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February 20, 2022

My Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I pray this message finds you all well and healthy.

Today, February 20th, is the Sunday of the Prodigal Son and the second Sunday of the Triodion period. The Holy Fathers of our church chose wisely to have the parable of the Prodigal Son be read from the Holy Scriptures on this particular Sunday to further spiritually prepare us as we approach Great Lent. Great Lent is the beginning of our path towards celebrating the Holy Feast of Pascha that commemorates the Resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Jesus said this parable to His Apostles in order to show them that everything can be forgiven by God if we have true repentance in our hearts which unites the repentant person with the heavenly realm of our Triune God, no matter the sin's seriousness. By God's Grace, the sins that we truly repent are forgiven through the Holy Sacrament of Confession. But we must note that true repentance does not stop at confession, but, rather, by our efforts to change our sinful ways and follow Christ—which allows us to humble ourselves and work towards attaining Theosis. In this parable, we see the unwavering love that God the Father has for us. We see that when children who have fallen away from God's path return to their Father with repentance and a true change of heart, they are forgiven and accepted. God honors, strengthens and embraces all of His children who repent of their sins and desire to change their sinful ways and follow His Divine Will. He gives them hope, joy, harmony, peace and Divine Love. God waits for us to willingly confess our sins, turn away from them and hope in His Holy Will, Mercy and Grace to transform our bodies, minds and souls to become His true children and members of His eternal and heavenly family.

On February 21st we celebrate the feast day of St. Eustathios, Archbishop of Antioch. He was born in the 3rd century and reposed in the Lord mid-4th century A.D. From his early youth, St. Eustathios had a divine love for studying the Holy Scriptures, as well as the teachings of the Holy Fathers. He was very loyal to Christian tradition, which was passed down to us by the Holy Apostles. He was blessed with great intellect and became a very strong defender of the true faith against the heresies of his time. As Bishop of Beroea (in present-day Syria), he was called to participate in Nicaea at the First Ecumenical Council of 325 A.D. to resolve the heresy of Arianism. His theological clarity and strong stance against the Arians resulted in the heretics hating him to the point of accusing him that he had a relationship with a woman who, they claimed, bore his child. Unfortunately, this false and unproven accusation resulted in his exile to Trajanopolis in Thrace. His patience and humility in the face of his unjust accusers purified him to the point of holiness, and when he reposed in the Lord, his holy relics performed and continue to perform miracles, by God's Grace, for the faithful who venerates them and pray for his intercessory prayers.

On February 23rd celebrate the feast day of St. Polycarp the Holy Martyr and Bishop of Smyrna. He was born around 80 A.D. and martyred in 167 A.D. in his late 80's. St. Polycarp was orphaned at a young age and from his early childhood was baptized and lived a holy Christian life according to God's Holy Will and Commandments. St. Polycarp, like St. Eustathios, dedicated himself with persistence and diligence to study the Holy Scriptures and the Patristic theology of his time. He was a true Christian leader, because he was skilled not

only in administrative and pastoral matters but, also, in matters of theology, both in theory and in practice. St. Polycarp fought with zeal against the heresies of his time and held strong and true to the teachings of the Apostles (as he was a disciple of St. John the Theologian). He helped to resolve the Paschal controversy, which was a dispute about the date on which Pascha should be celebrated. During the time of the Roman persecution against Christians, St. Polycarp was arrested and brought to trial. They asked him to renounce Christ and, instead, he zealously confessed his faith in and love for Christ. St. Polycarp was thrown into the fire and, having witnessed that the fire did not burn him, he was pierced in his side and martyred for the love of Christ.

On February 26th we celebrate the feast day of St. Porphyrios, Bishop of Gaza. St. Porphyrios was born around the year 346 A.D. and reposed in the Lord around 420 A.D. St. Porphyrios was born in Thessalonica, but at the age of twenty-five he left his homeland and went to Egypt to live under the guidance of St. Macarius the Great. Then he went on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem to spread the Gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. He became a priest monk in 392 and the Bishop of Gaza three years later. He was a zealous and God-fearing shepherd of his flock and a strong Christian witness of his times, as with against the heresy of Pelagianism alongside with St. Augustine of Hippo. In their struggle against the idolaters, St. Porphyrios, together with St. John Chrysostom met with Empress Eudoxia, and they won her favor. As a result of their prayers, she gave birth to an heir to the throne, and, in gratitude, the Emperor issued an edict in 401 A.D. that restored privileges to Christians and provided financial support to establish churches where Christians could worship our Trinitarian God and venerate His Holy Saints.

Let us all imitate the repentance and returning of the Prodigal Son to his Father, our God, and imitate the Father's forgiveness towards the Prodigal Son by forgiving those who have hurt us. Let us become like St. Eustathios, stable (like the meaning of his name) to the Word of God and the practice of His Holy Gospel in our daily lives. Let us become spiritually fruitful, as was St. Polycarp, in our attainment of holy virtues and divine love—both for the Glory of God and the salvation of our souls. And let us all show our love and support towards our Christian churches and serve them according to our God-given talents, as did St. Porphyrios, so that we can become like lit candles of divine love for the spiritual prosperity of our fellow human, be they Christian or not.



Yours in Christ,

+Rev. Economos Fr. Georgios Manias

