

## 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.

Today, March 13th, we celebrate the Sunday of Orthodoxy. When we enter a Greek Orthodox Church, we observe the rich iconography painted or hanging on the walls or placed on icon stands. Sometimes we take certain ecclesiastical traditions for granted without realizing their historical importance, as is the case with our use of iconography. We need to understand the use and essentiality of iconography to our Orthodox Christian faith. Icons depicting the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, Jesus Christ, as well as the Holy Theotokos, the Holy Saints, holy events and the Heavenly Hosts, play a major role in the Orthodox Christian faith because they help to preserve the doctrinal teachings of the Church and provide man with a way to express the divine through art and beauty.

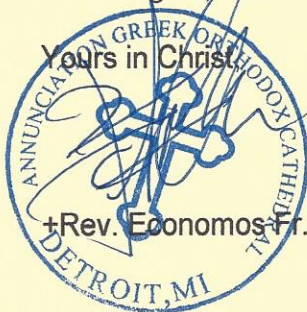
When we venerate icons, we show our respect, love and honor for those depicted in them, and we can, also, communicate directly with them, as they serve as windows into the heavenly realm. We must be clear, however, that absolute worship belongs to our Trinitarian God alone, which means that we do not worship the physical icons themselves; this distinction separates us from idolatry. The Orthodox Christian doctrine relating to the veneration of Holy icons was decided upon by the Fathers of the 7th Ecumenical Council and was firmly put in place by Empress Theodora in 843 A.D., which ended the heresy of iconoclasm and restored iconography to its rightful place in the Orthodox Church. It is this event that we celebrate on the Sunday of Orthodoxy, and we must not forget the importance of iconography in the expression of our faith. Icons provide us with an essential way of expressing our true faith theologically through shape, line and color, and our veneration of them is one of the main theological practices that differentiate us from those of other Christian denominations.

On March 15th we celebrate the feast day of St. Agapios the martyr and his Companions, St. Timolaus of Pontus, St. Dionysius of Tripolis (Phoenicia), St. Dionysius, St. Romulus of Diospolis, St. Alexander and St. Plesis of Egypt and St. Alexander of Gaza. They martyred in the early fourth century A.D. and they all had one thing in common: their strong faith and loyalty to our Lord Jesus Christ. During the reign of Diocletian who persecuted the Christians, they lived the reality that Christ is "the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6) and, so, Christ became the only purpose for their existence and the reason they boldly confessed their faith in Him and became martyrs for the Glory of God. Hearing about the persecution of Christians, the Saints tied their own hands and presented themselves to the Governor of Caesarea of Palestine, professing their faith in Christ. They were thrown into prison and beheaded shortly afterwards. They could not be enticed to change their belief in Christ—for whichever soul Christ visits He completes and overwhelms it with Divine love, harmony and happiness, which is incomparable to anything that can be offered by anything or anyone on earth. All eight of these Christians, with peace and true joy in their hearts, sacrificed their earthly lives in order to live eternally in the heavens with their beloved God and His holy people.

On March 16th we celebrate the feast day of St. Christodoulos the Wonderworker of Patmos. St. Christodoulos was born in 1020 A.D., in Bithynia, Asia Minor, and reposed in the Lord in 1093 A.D. at the age of 73. From his youth he wished to live a monastic life and, so, he spiritually and physically sought to do so by becoming a monk at the Monastery of Olympus in Bithynia and traveling to many holy places, such as the Holy Land, Mount Latros in Nicaea, Strovilos of Asia Minor, and the islands of Leros, Kos, Patmos and Euboia. His dream was to establish a monastery on the island of Patmos, which he succeeded in doing with the help of Emperor Alexis I Comnenus, and he dedicated it to St. John the Theologian. However, because of frequent pirate invasions to Patmos and the Aegean islands, he found refuge with his brotherhood on the island of Euboia. He remained in Euboia until he reposed in the Lord, and, after the end of the pirate invasions to the Aegean islands, his holy relics were transferred, according to his wishes, to the Monastery of Patmos. He was a holy man who lived a holy, sacramental life of asceticism, fasting, prayer and philanthropy. During his earthly life, he performed a great number of miracles by praying to our Triune God and His Saints, which gave hope to many people seeking help and relief from their various unpleasant circumstances. To this day, his holy relics are kept in the northwest part of the Monastery of Patmos and perform miracles for the faithful.

On March 19th we celebrate the feast day of St. Chrysanthus and St. Daria the Martyrs who martyred near the end of the 3th century. St. Chrysanthus was from Alexandria and was the son of a noble pagan family. His father was very upset when he found out that his son was a Christian and tried to convert him back to his pagan faith by forcing him to marry a young and beautiful pagan lady from Athens named Daria. But his father's plan failed because St. Chrysanthus's beloved wife Daria became Christian, and they worked together to preach about Christ, turning many to Christianity. They were arrested for catechizing others to Christianity and were sentenced to death by being buried alive. In this way this holy married couple became witnesses and martyrs of their authentic Christian life for the Glory of God and the spiritual strengthening of His people.

Let us all do our cross and venerate those depicted in Orthodox Christian icons whenever we see them and remember that they are windows into the heavenly realm of God. Let us all imitate the courage and love for Christ that St. Agapios the martyr and his seven companions showed during the time of the Christian persecutions and honor them by living our lives according to Christ's teachings, in holiness and spiritual progression. Let us all venerate the icon of St. Christodoulos and ask that him to intercede to our Triune God for us to help us during our times of need, and let us ask that we may be granted the blessing at least once in our lifetime to visit his holy Monastery on Patmos, dedicated to St. John the Theologian and Evangelist. And let us all imitate the strong faith in God that the holy couple, St. Chrysanthos and St. Daria, had and ask for their intercessory prayers so that God may assist us to live not only in His image, but also in His likeness through our thoughts, words and deeds, as well.



Rev. Ekonomos Fr. Georgios Manias

