

ANNUNCIATION GREEK ORTHODOX CATHEDRAL

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April 17, 2022

My Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I pray this message finds you all well and healthy.

Today, April 17th, we celebrate the feast day of Palm Sunday, as we do every ecclesiastical year on the Sunday before Pascha. Palm Sunday marks the beginning of Holy Week, which leads us from the Entrance of Christ into the Jerusalem and culminates with His Glorious and Holy Resurrection. On this day, Christ offers Himself as a ransom for all of humanity and as we progress through Holy Week we witness Christ's love for us through His willing Crucifixion on the Cross. Through His self-sacrifice He reunites us with God (after our separation from Him from the Fall of Adam and Eve). As perfect human and perfect God, Jesus Christ is sinless and a stranger to evil doings, yet He intentionally offered His human body as the sacrificial lamb, so that through His Resurrection we have the opportunity (through repentance and our own free will) to follow His path to gain eternal life in His Heavenly Kingdom. This path begins with our baptism in the name of the Holy Trinity.

Many citizens of Jerusalem felt that the human-divine person of Jesus Christ was the prophesied One and Messiah. They felt that He would grant salvation to all those seeking repentance and forgiveness in His name and reestablish their heavenly citizenship in the Kingdom of God. Old, young, men, women and children all praised Christ as the Lord and King of Israel, the High Priest and the savior of us all. And Christ's Entrance into Jerusalem symbolized Christ's obedience to His Father's Will and marked the beginning of the events that would culminate in His Resurrection and triumphant victory over death.

On April 21st we celebrate the feast day of St. Ianouarios the Holy Martyr and his Companions. St. Ianouarios was from the region of Campania in Italy and lived during the middle of the 3rd and beginning of the 4th centuries. St. Ianouarios was Bishop of Benevento in Campania and was a man of unwavering love for and strong faith in our Trinitarian God. When the edict of Diocletian against Christians was issued, St. Ianouarios was instantly arrested alongside the deacons and readers who served with him, as well as two nobles from Puteoli. With his unwavering belief in our Savior Jesus Christ, he was steadfast in the faith and did not betray his love for our Trinitarian God. They were all found guilty and their martyrdom began, for the Glory of God. They were thrown into a furnace and after they remained unscathed, they were thrown to the wild animals. The animals did not bother them, and because no torture could harm them or bend their will and love for Christ, St. Ianouarios and his Companions were executed by beheading in 305 A.D.

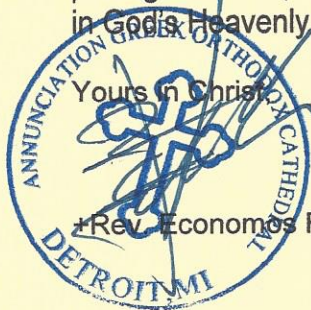
On April 22nd, Holy Friday, we commemorate the death of Jesus Christ on the Cross. On this day, we remember everything that Christ our God humbly endured for our salvation—mockery, crown of thorns, scourging, being nailed to the cross and His thirst being quenched with vinegar and gall. Sin has polluted God's creation since the Fall of Adam and Eve. Christ, as the New Adam, is sinless, and His self-sacrifice destroyed sin and death itself, opening up to us the path of redemption and the salvation of our souls. Let us think for a moment that Christ was completely innocent of the crimes that he was found guilty of and being punished for. He buried their falsehoods and He humbly and quietly endured their unjust treatment. Even though He was virtuous and sinless, He was crucified on the Cross as if he was a criminal, alongside other convicted criminals. Being the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, He fully understood the reason that He was sent to us by God the Father; by wearing our human flesh, He could offer Himself as a sacrifice for our sins, guide us towards the Heavenly Kingdom, conquer death and reunite us with God and become the Heavenly Shepherd of all our souls.

His Golgotha became an exemplar for us to walk our own Golgotha and to carry our own cross with patience, love, humbleness and obedience. By crucifying our flesh with its passions, we die in the flesh and become united with God. To die in the flesh means to trade in our own will with that of God's, so that God's Will becomes victoriously glorified, praised and manifested through all of Creation. Christ was crucified around noon (which is the third hour in Byzantine times) and approximately around 3:00 p.m. (the ninth hour in Byzantine times) is when He gave up His spirit in perfect love and perfect obedience to the Will of God the Father.

The entirety of creation acknowledged Christ's death: "the earth quaked, and the rocks were split, and the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised;" (Matthew 27:51-52) Even the veil closing off the Holy of Holies (a sacred area of the temple in Jerusalem) was torn into two. The veil is a symbol of the separation between God and man, and Christ's death regains us access to and communion with God. All of creation acknowledged the death of the human nature of its divine Creator who was incarnated of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and became man. Upon His death, Christ's spirit enters Hades to preach to the departed souls there; whoever accepted His Father's Gospel found salvation and followed Christ to the Heavenly Kingdom. And we read in the Gospel of St. John that Christ was respectfully buried in a new tomb belonging to St. Joseph of Arimathea (a secret disciple of Christ) by St. Joseph himself and by St. Nikodemus (Christ's disciple by night). For this reason, every Friday throughout the entire ecclesiastical year we commemorate the Crucifixion and death of Christ by keeping the fast, which we do not only by being mindful of what we eat but also by offering Christ-like love in word, thought and deed.

On April 23rd we celebrate the feast day of St. George the Great Martyr and Triumphant who lived during the 3rd century. His father was from Cappadocia and his mother was from Palestine. Due to his strength and courage, he was elevated to an elite role in the Emperor Diocletian's army becoming commander of a thousand troops. Despite his high military ranking, when Diocletian's edict against Christians was issued, he remained loyal to our Trinitarian God and his Christian faith. He was arrested and martyred greatly without any hesitation, remaining faithful to our beloved Christ and God. His tortures became a steadfast example of faith and an inspiration to all who witnessed it, especially Empress Alexandra, who, as a result, became a Christian. After leading many people to the Christian faith, he was beheaded and buried in Lydda, Palestine, which was his mother's hometown, where today a church in his name can be found at his tomb.

Let us all praise the Entrance of our Lord, Jesus Christ into Jerusalem by allowing Him into our hearts. Let us all be inspired by the life of self-denial and self-sacrifice of St. Ianouarios and his Companions and follow the Will of God until the last moments of our earthly lives. Let us all with faith, love, patience and humbleness walk our personal Golgotha and carry our own cross and never forget to humble ourselves and to strive to be in communion with our Trinitarian God—so that we can crucify our flesh with its passions and be reunited with our Creator in eternal life. And let us all seek the intercessions of St. George the Great Martyr and Triumphant in our earthly lives so that, by putting Christ on, we can battle valiantly against our passions and earn eternal rest among the saints in God's Heavenly Kingdom.



+Rev. Economos Fr. Georgios Manias

