



## ANNUNCIATION GREEK ORTHODOX CATHEDRAL

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My Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Χριστός Ανέστη! Αληθώς Ανέστη!

Christ is Risen! Truly He is Risen!

I pray this message finds you all well and healthy.

Today, May 1st, we celebrate the Sunday of St. Thomas. It is a very spiritually didactic Sunday because we learn two major things: The one concerns our faith and belief towards our Lord, Jesus Christ, and the other concerns our liturgical perception and realization of every Sunday's service. In today's Gospel according to St. John the Evangelist we read about Christ's two appearances to His disciples after His Resurrection. His first appearance occurs the Sunday evening of the Resurrection, after the Jewish Passover, and His second appearance occurs the following Sunday, eight days after Christ's Resurrection. After His crucifixion and death, Christ's apostles hid from the Jews because they were afraid of being harmed by them due to their close relationship with our human-divine Lord and Second Person of the Holy Trinity, Jesus Christ. On both occasions the apostles were gathered secretly in order to share in the anguish of their lived experiences involving Christ's human death. The only difference between the two gatherings was that in the first one apostle Thomas was absent and, therefore, did not witness Christ's first appearance to the disciples. On both occasions the doors of the room in which the apostles had gathered was closed and locked so that nobody was able to enter, due to the fear they had of the Jews who were against Christ and His disciples. Yet Christ appeared to the disciples at both gatherings by entering the room and saying to them: "Peace *be* with you." (John 20:19)

After Christ's first appearance to His disciples, Thomas joined them and when they told him of Christ's Resurrection, he did not believe them, saying, "Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe." (John 20:25) When Christ appeared to His disciples a second time eight days after His first appearance to them, Thomas was there. In response to his request to see and feel Christ's wounds on his hands and side, Christ invited Thomas: "Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand *here*, and put *it* into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing." After this experience, Thomas exclaimed, "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:28)

The Sunday of St. Thomas is the first Sunday after Holy Pascha, which, Liturgically, is when the Church consecrates every Sunday of the year in commemoration of Pascha (Christ's Resurrection.) This is the reason this Sunday is called 'Antipascha,' meaning 'in the stead of Pascha.'

On May 3rd we celebrate the feast day of St. Timothy and St. Mavra the Martyrs, a newly-married couple Penapeis (Thebaid, Egypt), and they lived during the 3rd century during the reign of Diocletian, who was a very unmerciful and bloodthirsty enemy of Christians. St. Timothy and St. Mavra were both followers of Christ and, for this reason, they were arrested, tortured and put to death by crucifixion, for the glory of God and for the spiritual strengthening of their fellow Christians at that time.



On May 3rd we, also, celebrate the feast day of St. Peter the Wonderworker, Bishop of Argos, who was born and raised in Constantinople and lived during the 9th and early 10th centuries. From his early youth he dedicated himself to asceticism, as well as to studying the scriptures and patristic theology of the holy fathers. He was raised and escalated to the office of hierarchy by St. Peter the Patriarch of Constantinople and was placed to assist the Patriarch's brother, St. Paul Metropolitan of Corinth. When the Metropolis of Argos needed a new Bishop, the people of Argos and Nafplion requested from Metropolitan Paul to place St. Peter as Bishop, St. Peter accepted and became the spiritual shepherd of all Christians of that region. In his position, St. Peter became for them a living image of Christ in his asceticism, compassion and philanthropy. His holiness was witnessed and experienced by many faithful and he showed mercy to all. He reposed peacefully in our Lord around 928 A.D. and his holy relics became a miraculous relief for all believers who venerated them with faith, respect and love towards his holiness and his loyalty to our Trinitarian God.

On May 5th we celebrate the feast day of St. Irene the Great Martyr. She came from a royal family and was the daughter of the pagan King Licinius and his wife Licinia. Regardless of their lack of belief in our Trinitarian God, from her early youth St. Irene miraculously believed in Christ being the Second Person of the Holy Trinity. When her father found out that she was a Christian and destroyed all his pagan idols, she was arrested and tortured by being dragged by horses. She remained unharmed, but when the horses stopped, one of them stomped on her father, killing him instantly. In the name of the Holy Trinity, St. Irene resurrected her father, and from that moment he believed and was later catechized and baptized a Christian. St. Irene became a zealous preacher, teacher and disciple of Christ by spreading His Gospel wherever she went. When the time of her repose in the Lord approached, she went to Ephesus and found an untouched, open tomb. She laid herself there and peacefully gave up her spirit to our Trinitarian God. St. Irene was greatly venerated by the Church of Constantinople and therefore many churches were, and still are, dedicated in her name. Thera, which is one of the many beautiful islands in the Cyclades of Greece, took its name at the end of the 12th century B.C. from the Spartan King Theras who was the son of Autesion. During the Crusades a group of crusaders established a small church on the island of Thera dedicated to Saint Irene (Santa Irini) and over time the name of the island became known as 'Santorini,' which is an alteration of the name 'Santa Irini.'

Let us all trust in our Resurrected Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and remain steadfast in our Christian faith and our belief in Christ's Glorious Third-Day Resurrection. Let us imitate the divine love and loyalty that the holy married couple, St. Timothy and St. Mavra the Martyrs, showed to our beloved Lord, Jesus Christ, to the point of sacrificing their own lives for God's Heavenly Kingdom. Let us live our lives in holiness, as did St. Peter the Wonderworker, Bishop of Argos, so that we may spiritually struggle to attain the holy virtues of God's grace in order to become one with our Triune God. And let us all become strong in faith and spirit towards Christ, as was St. Irene, and seek to live a Christian life in love and forgiveness, for the salvation of our souls and for life eternal.

Yours in our Risen Christ,

Rev. Ekonomos Fr. Georgios Manias

