



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 July 4th we celebrate the feast day of St. Andrew of Crete, Author of the Great Canon, which is read in segments throughout the ecclesiastical year, and in its entirety on the 5th Thursday of Great Lent. St. Andrew was born and raised in the city of Damascus by Antiochian Christian parents. He so loved the Holy Scriptures and the Divine Ecclesiastical hymnologies, literature, and writings of our Christian faith that he went to serve as a reader at the Patriarchate of Jerusalem in order to study, understand and learn more about Christianity and immerse himself in the depth of Theology, both in theory and in practice. St. Andrew's understanding of Theology was so deep that despite the fact that he was only a reader for the Church he was invited to participate at the Sixth Ecumenical Council against the heresy of the Monophysites. In Constantinople, St. Andrew was escalated from a deacon to Archbishop of Crete. As a melodist and poet, he left an incredibly rich legacy of canons and hymns to the entire Orthodox Christian world, which are chanted every ecclesiastical year in specific services and especially his Great Canon which is chanted on the 5th Thursday of Great Lent.

On July 6th we celebrate the feast day of St. Sisoes the Great who lived during the 4th century A.D. St. Sisoes was a monk at a monastery called Scete of Nitria, which was located between Alexandria and Cairo in Egypt, just west of the Nile Delta. St. Sisoes the Great lived in the spiritual footsteps of Saint Anthony the Great in terms of humility, patience, prayer, asceticism and love. For St. Sisoes, St. Anthony the Great was his model of monastic holiness and spiritual struggle. Through St. Anthony's example, St. Sisoes practiced hermetic silence and noetic prayer, which gave way to his ascetic repentance, attainment of Christian virtues, purification and sanctification. Through his holiness and philanthropy, St. Sisoes became a living blessing to whoever approached him, and he unconditionally and endlessly shared his love in Christ to all and for all, for the Glory of God and the spiritual prosperity of His people. St. Sisoes lived as an angel on earth by continuously Doxologizing and being in constant communion with our Trinitarian God. After St. Anthony reposed in peace in the Lord, St. Sisoes went to live the rest of his ascetic life in a cave until his own repose. By faithfully walking in the footsteps of St. Anthony, who was a great and holy ascetic, he himself acquired holiness and has rightfully gained the title of 'Great,' as well.

On July 7th we celebrated the feast day of Saint Kyriaki the Great Martyr. St. Kyriaki lived during the reigns of the Roman Emperors Diocletian and Maximian. St. Kyriaki's parents were Christians and were arrested under edict against Christ's followers, tortured and condemned to death by beheading. Despite her youth and beauty and despite living under constant threat of Christian persecution, St. Kyriaki did not give up her faith in Jesus Christ in order to live a prosperous and comfortable life in sin and transient, earthly joy. After giving an extraordinary speech of her allegiance to Christ, the Bridegroom of our souls, St. Kyriaki the Great Martyr was tortured and beheaded, thus joining her parents in the Heavenly Kingdom of God.

On July 8th we celebrate the feast day of Saint Prokopios the Great Martyr and his mother St. Theodosia the Martyr. St. Prokopios lived during the end of the 3rd century A.D. and the beginning of the 4th century A.D., and he was born into a pagan family and named Neanias prior to him pledging his allegiance to Christ. Despite the fact that his father Christopher was a Christian, from his early youth St. Prokopios embraced his mother Theodosia's faith in idolatry. When his father died, his mother went to Emperor Diocletian to ask him a favor on her son's behalf, which was to escalate her son to the office of Duke of Alexandria, which was a more authoritative position within the Empire. There was one condition, however, for him to attain this higher standing, which was to capture, imprison, torture and execute all the Christians of Alexandria and whichever Christian he met along his way. But like Saul's conversion on the road to Damaskas, when Neanias was on his way to Alexandria the Lord spoke to him. As a result, Neanias turned back to preach Christ to all.

When St. Prokopios returned home a Christian, his mother Theodosia led her son to the authorities in order to be questioned and punished for his Christian beliefs. While in prison, the Lord appeared to him again and gave him the name Prokopios, which in Greek means 'the one who progresses in spirit and faith.' St. Prokopios suffered so many tortures that the idolaters who witnessed them, including his own mother, believed in our Trinitarian God and confessed their faith in Him, resulting in their own martyrdom by beheading. After further torments and imprisonment, St. Prokopios was beheaded.

Let us all read and study the theological meanings of the hymns that are captured in the Great Canon of St. Andrew of Crete and spiritually contemplate them, so that we can nourish our souls as we journey towards the Heavenly Kingdom of God. Let us all follow the ascetic life, humility and obedience of St. Sisoies the Great (who was a student of St. Anthony the Great) by building a meaningful relationship with our spiritual father who has the God-given responsibility to guide us in our repentance, spiritual struggles and path towards attaining holiness. Let us all ask God to give us strength of soul and spirit, like that of St. Kyriaki the Great Martyr, so that, like her, we may confess and testify His glory through our thoughts, words and deeds every day of our lives. And let us all imitate St. Prokopios the Great Martyr's steadfastness in faith and love for our Trinitarian God, despite any difficult circumstances that we may be faced, so that we may live a life dedicated to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, for the benefit of our souls and for our eternal salvation.

Yours in Christ,

+Rev. Ekonomos Fr. Georgios Manias

