



ANNUNCIATION GREEK ORTHODOX CATHEDRAL

707 East Lafayette Boulevard • Detroit, Michigan 48226
Church: (313) 965-2988 • Fax: (313) 965-2988
Email: Annunciation@prodigy.net



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My Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I pray this message finds you all well and healthy.

On August 15th we celebrate the feast day of the Dormition of our Most Holy Lady the Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary. In the middle of the 1st century A.D. the Panagia and Mother of God was informed by Archangel Gabriel that in a few days' time she would repose to the Heavens and reunite with her beloved Son and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. When she heard this news, heavenly joy overwhelmed her heart and spirit and she began preparing herself for her departure from this earthly world and arrival to the eternal one. She went to the Mount of Olives, where her Son loved to go frequently (especially during the night to pray in peace amongst nature, which our Triune God created). There, the Most Holy Theotokos spiritually prepared for her earthly departure, and, then, descended the Mountain to prepare herself physically. After completing all the necessary preparations, she laid on her death bed ready for her Heavenly departure. Miraculously, all the Holy Apostles and disciples of Christ, except for Thomas, were instantly transferred, by Divine intercession, by a cloud in order to be present at the Dormition of our Most Holy Lady the Theotokos.

After her Holy Dormition, the Panagia was carried by the Holy Apostles to her birth city of Gethsemane in order to be buried. On the way there, an unbelieving man tried to harm her reposed body and, after putting his hands on her deathbed, an invisible sword cut both of his hands and fell to the ground. The sinful man, acknowledging his error and with cries of repentance, asked for forgiveness and his hands were miraculously reattached to his body. Three days following Panagia's burial, Christ resurrected her body and she was translated into Heaven, as witnessed by all the Holy Apostles (including Thomas), thus joining her Son in Heavenly joy and peace. As she ascended into the Heavens, her Holy Belt fell from her waist and was collected with honor and respect by the Holy Apostles. Panagia's Holy Belt is still with us today and can be found at the Vatopedi monastery on Mount Athos. Because the Dormition of the Theotokos involves her burial, resurrection and ascension into the Heavens, this feast day reminds us of Pascha, which is why it is also known as the Small Pascha of summer, and it is for this reason that from August 1st until August 15th, we are to fast strictly in the same manner as we do during Great Lent.

On August 16th we celebrate the feast day of St. Diomedes the Martyr who lived during the 3rd century A.D. during the reign of Emperor Diocletian and his edict against Christians. St. Diomedes was from Tarsus of Cilicia and lived later in Nicaea of Bethany where he reposed. By profession, St. Diomedes was a superb physician, as well as a faithful Christian. Both the science of medicine and St. Diomedes's faith in Christ combined together to serve philanthropically all the people who, by God's Providence, sought him to assist them in their physical or spiritual healing. St. Diomedes was an unmercenary physician and, with his medical knowledge and God's Grace, gave hope to those around him by curing the sick of their illnesses, catechizing others in the faith and being a model of Christian virtue. When his holy Christian life became known to the local authorities, soldiers were ordered to immediately arrest him and bring him to Emperor Diocletian. When the soldiers found him, St. Diomedes had already died, so they beheaded him, which immediately blinded them, and they brought his head to the Emperor. They were, then, ordered to return his head to his body and, upon doing so, their sight was restored. St. Diomedes the Martyr ended his holy, earthly life by worshipping

and glorifying our Triune God, living the truth of the Holy Gospel in thought, word and deed and being an unmercenary Physician to the sick and suffering, helping to heal them both in body and soul.

On August 17th we celebrate the feast day of St. Myron the Martyr of Cyzicus, who lived during the 3rd century A.D. during the reign of Emperor Decius, who issued an edict against Christians. St. Myron loved our Triune God immensely and became one of the most holy and dedicated priests of his time. He regularly celebrated the Holy Sacraments and philanthropically served daily the spiritual and physical needs of the people. When he was arrested by the authorities, he did not betray his dedication and loyalty to Christ, no matter the threats of torture or death. After his refusal to worship the idols, he was tortured and beheaded, thus joining the company of the Holy Saints in God's Heavenly Kingdom.

On August 19th we celebrate the feast day of St. Andrew the General and Martyr and his 2,593 soldiers. St. Andrew was a General of the Roman Imperial Army. Around the year 289 A.D., he was sent by Antiochus, the Commander-in-Chief of the Roman forces, along with many other pagan soldiers, to defend the eastern borders of the Empire against attacks by the Persians. St. Andrew and his men were greatly outnumbered and their victory was not likely. St. Andrew, as a believer in Christ, proclaimed to his soldiers that Christ was the Son of God and asked all of his men to pray to Him for His intercessions. Against all odds, St. Andrew and his soldiers defeated the Persians and his soldiers became believers in Christ. Although Antiochus, the Commander-in-Chief, was pleased about their victory, their confession as Christians led to their trial and torture. The Christian faith of St. Andrew and his soldiers was so strong that they did not waver in their loyalty to Christ. Eventually Antiochus commanded 1,000 other soldiers to drive the saints beyond the Empire's borders, but through St. Andrew's instruction, they, too, converted to Christianity. In the end, Antiochus gave the command for St. Andrew and his soldiers to be beheaded.

Let us all spiritual experience the Small Pascha of the Dormition of the Most Holy Theotokos this Ecclesiastical Year and prepare ourselves to rejoice with her holy ascension, which reunited her with her beloved Son and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Let us pray for the intercessions of St. Diomedes the Martyr that God not only heals all our illnesses, both in body and soul, but, also, that God helps us to become better, more dedicated Christians each day that passes, for His glory. Let us become like St. Myron the Martyr of Cyzicus who was a Holy vessel and torch of God's love, so that we may be true Christians in thought, word and deed, until the last day of our earthly lives. And let us all remember St. Andrew the General and his 2,593 soldiers who gave up their earthly lives without fear and in faith and pray to our Trinitarian God to always send His Grace upon us so that we may join them eternally as citizens of God's Heavenly Kingdom.

