

1974 JUL 20 - AUG 18

TURKISH INVASION OF CYPRUS

Cyprus

July 20th Sunday's Memorial Service (July 20th, 2025) commemorates the 51- year anniversary of the tragic Turkish invasion on the island of Cyprus.

As some of you may recall the Turkish invasion on Cyprus occurred on 20 July 1974. It's been 51 years since that tragic day and so it is with faith, reverence and humility that we once again honor in blessed memory the heroic dead including the innocent men, women, children, clergy, Greek and Cypriot military troops who lost their lives at the hands of the Turkish military forces.

We also extend our empathy to the families and relatives of the missing persons as well as the enduring enclaved and the refugees who for 51 years are bearing a cross of painful torment, deep sorrow and anguish, unthinkable suffering and the ongoing injustice of the brutal Turkish invasion 51 years ago.

About 500 miles South East of Greece is the island of Cyprus. It's a small island in the eastern Mediterranean sea (about the same size as the state of New Jersey).

Cyprus joined the European Union in May of 2004.

It was the Apostle Barnaba's who brought Orthodox Christianity to Cyprus while on a missionary journey there some 2000 years ago.

In August 1960 -- Cyprus declared its independence from Great Britain and became the Republic of Cyprus in accord with the London and Zurich agreements. Archbishop Makarios III became its first president.

On 15 July 1974 -- a military coup d'état comprised of Greek and Cypriot army officers who were in favor of unifying the island with Greece overthrew the presidency of Archbishop Makarios III thereby destabilizing the government of Cyprus.

On 20 July 1974 – Operation Attila – The Turkish code name for its military invasion of Cyprus commences in the early dawn hours. It was a Saturday morning that will never be forgotten, as thousands of heavily armed Turkish military troops began to descend with vicious force on the northern shores of Kyrenia (Kyrenia is less than 100 miles from the southern coast of Turkey). The invading Turkish forces were also descending on other parts of the island by land, sea & air.

On 16 August 1974 – A UN ceasefire resolution was declared however the Turkish forces ignored the ceasefire and advanced their position further and took of the coastal town of Famagusta, a beloved place and popular destination among tourists and citizens alike. Famagusta is the home town of my family. It's where my two sisters and I were born and raised. Famagusta was one of the dozens of towns and villages captured by the invading Turkish forces. In the 27 days and nights of the invasion the Turkish military forces captured and currently control approximately 37% of the northern areas of the island. And to this day Turkey has an estimated military force of 43,000 heavily armed troops stationed in the occupied areas of the island.

I point this out to you, because from 20 July through 16 August of 1974 the brutal and barbaric Turkish military invasion of Cyprus devastated the country and its citizens as thousands of innocent men women children and clergy including Greek and Cypriot soldiers tragically lost their lives because of their faith and duty to defend freedom, justice, human dignity, democracy, sovereignty, Orthodoxy on the island of Cyprus. For 27 days and nights the military fighting on the island was fierce, ruthless and unrelenting. The Greek and Cypriot military forces put up a strong fight, bravely resisted and with heroic efforts repelled the Turkish forces to the best of their human and military capability.

As you can imagine during those 27 days and nights thousands upon thousands of innocent and rightful citizens of Cyprus were running for their lives many with just the clothes on their back. The Turkish military forces moved swiftly and began to capture and control the abandoned towns and villages in rapid fashion. As a result, the rightful Cypriot citizens lost everything - their homes, possessions, neighborhoods, businesses, schools, churches, monasteries including friends and loved ones. Understandably these innocent people were terrified and horrified beyond words by the unspeakable violence and brutality they witnessed and suffered at the hands of the Turkish military forces.

Many more thousands of Greek Cypriots were forced and expelled from their homes and residences and became refugees in their own country. All together an estimated 200,000 (that's one third of the island population at that time.) refugees. Thousands of these refugees faced difficult decisions about their future and had no choice other than to leave their country and emigrate elsewhere starting a new life in Europe, Australia, Canada, USA and elsewhere.

The staggering economic devastation across the entire island took its toll as the illegal Turkish invasion and occupation not only brought destruction but also financial ruin to the part of the island which was the richest and most developed.

There was widespread looting and theft on abandoned properties and businesses. The hotels in the popular coastal town of Famagusta were literally stripped of all their contents including windows, doors plumbing, furniture and appliances. There were reports of mass killings, executions, sexual assault on innocent women and young girls including senseless beatings and torture of civilians.

Over 3,000 Greek Cypriots including military were killed as a consequence of the invasion.

Approximately 1,600 Greek Cypriots remain missing without a trace.

Hundreds of thousands of illegal Turkish settlers now occupy the northern 37% of the island that was captured during the illegal Turkish invasion of Cyprus.

In the Turkish occupied area of Cyprus, there appears to be no end in sight of illegal construction as well as seizure and sale of properties and land which are rightfully owned by Greek Cypriots.

Additionally, the Turkish regime systematically and methodically converted approximately 55 churches similar to the one we are in right now into mosques while approximately 50 or more churches and monasteries were converted into stables, barns, taverns, stores, hostels, public bathrooms, storage facilities, museums while a number of other churches were defaced and demolished or left in disrepair and falling to ruin.

The Greek Cypriots on the other hand have preserved the Turkish mosques in their original state as well as the abandoned residences of the Turkish Cypriots.

Nicosia, the capital city of Cyprus remains as the only divided capital city on the face of the earth.

To the extent of achieving a peaceful and just solution to the ongoing Cyprus problem, it would seem that the country of Turkey is satisfied with the status quo: A divided island. And further insists on a two state solution in the context of a confederation.

On the other hand the government of the Republic of Cyprus insists on a peaceful and just solution that will terminate the invasion, illegal occupation, remove the illegal settlers, secure the one and only sovereignty and the one and only international legal entity, the one citizenship and unity of the island and the people with safeguard fundamental freedoms and human rights that will be based on the principles and resolutions of the UN and will be compatible with the *acquis communautaire* (the body of common rights and obligations).

Is there hope for a solution? Any hope of new peace talks between the current president of the Republic of Cyprus and Turkish Cypriot leader of the occupied north remain elusive as both sides continue to have unsettled differences in key issues that would allow a way forward in formulating a mutually agreeable and binding solution that would solve the ongoing injustice and rightfully reunify the island of Cyprus in accordance with international laws and UN resolutions. It's a task and a challenge that remains undone and has haunted Europe and the international community for decades.

It's been 50 years since the tragic Turkish invasion on the island of Cyprus. Although it seems that time is standing still with no solution in sight, let us be reminded that all things are possible with God. And as such, we trust God has a plan and a way forward for Cyprus and its rightful citizens. Furthermore, we can be certain that a day will come, when the voices of truth, liberty, peace and justice will prevail and bring about a just and permanent solution to the Cyprus problem.

July 20, 1974 will never be forgotten by the rightful citizens of Cyprus, the international community and the world at large. Because we as a people and as a community have a responsibility to pursue what is rightful and just in the sight of God. Therefore we press on with hope and faith to never forget who we are, where we came from, what we believe and what is right to the glory of God.

July 20, 1974 will forever be remembered as a day of tragedy, invasion, and division, loss of life, epic devastation and destruction and a ruthless injustice against humanity on the island of Cyprus.

And so once again and forever more we commemorate and honor these heroic men, women, children, clergy, Greek and Cypriot soldiers who sacrificed their life in being faithful to their duty and for the good of their country by defending freedom, peace, justice, human dignity, democracy, sovereignty and Orthodoxy on the island of Cyprus.

May the Lord have mercy on their soul and may their memory be eternal!