



**GREEK ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF AMERICA
ARCHEPISCOPAL ENCYCLICAL**

Prot. No. 29/2025

Archepiscopal Encyclical on the Feast of Saint Photios, Patriarch of Constantinople

February 6, 2025

Unto the Most Reverend and Right Reverend Hierarchs, Pious Priests and Deacons, the Monks and Nuns, Presidents and Members of Parish Councils, Honorable Archons of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, Members of Leadership 100, the Day and Afternoon Schools, Philoptochos Societies, the Youth, Greek Orthodox Organizations, and the entirety of the Christ-named Plenitude of the Holy Archdiocese of America:

***Fire-breathing Orator, Teacher of the Oikumene, Divine Presider of Constantinople....
(Vesperal Hymn of the Saint)***

Beloved sisters and brothers in Christ,

It is very hard to overestimate the importance of Saint Photios the Great, Patriarch of Constantinople, a true defender of the Orthodox Faith. To describe him as “fire-breathing” makes him sound a bit like a dragon. But what we should take away from such poetic embellishment is the passionate, profound and unwavering faith of the Ninth Century Ecumenical Patriarch, who not only championed the Faith of the Apostles in the face of innumerable challenges, but was deeply devoted to sharing that Faith with the world.

He was a believer in bringing the Gospel to the world that knew not the Lord Jesus Christ, and he actively worked to spread the Good News among the Slavic Peoples. To this end, he empowered two brothers from Thessaloniki, Saints Cyril and Methodios, to evangelize them. Saint Cyril (a student of Saint Photios when he presided at the

University of Constantinople) devised an alphabet for the languages they found called the Glagolitic Script, which is the origin of the alphabet we call Cyrillic and is still in use throughout the Slavic world today. To think of the genius of these apostolic pioneers, who achieved such greatness without any of the technological advantages we have today, is to glimpse a truly miraculous stewardship of the Teachings of Christ. If you compare the accomplishments of these brothers with the noise we experience today on the Internet and Social Media platforms, you will begin to understand that true Doctrine is passed on from one person to another, face to face. Not accelerated by algorithms, but advanced by the Spirit of God working in the lives of holy men and women.

Our Saint Photios Greek Orthodox National Shrine, an Institution of our Sacred Archdiocese of America, commemorates a different kind of evangelist, but one just as human as those wonderworking Saints. The Shrine commemorates the lives of the first Greek Orthodox immigrants to America, who brought the Orthodox Faith to these blessed shores along with their dreams for a better tomorrow. Intentionally, or unintentionally, these ancestors of our Church served as missionaries and apostolic delegates to America, as they founded community after community. Their preaching may not have been “fire-breathing,” but they lit the fire of Orthodoxy on this continent.

Therefore, on this Feast of Saint Photios, let us remember these pioneers, whose sacrifices made possible the incredible opportunities we have today to live our Orthodox Faith in the public square. They are worthy of the same quest for which Saint Photios commissioned Saints Cyril and Methodios. In thanksgiving for them, let us support the Saint Photios Shrine in every way we can, honoring the memory of those who came before us, and building a better future for the next generation of Faithful.

With paternal blessings in Christ,

A handwritten signature in Greek script, likely reading 'Ελπίδοφορος' (Elpidophoros), written in a fluid, cursive style.

† ELPIDOPHOROS
Archbishop of America