

GREEK ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF AMERICA

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Protocol 20/17

March 25, 2017

Feast of the Annunciation

Day of Greek Independence

To the Most Reverend Hierarchs, the Reverend Priests and Deacons, the Monks and Nuns, the Presidents and Members of the Parish Councils of the Greek Orthodox Communities, the Distinguished Archons of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, the Day, Afternoon, and Church Schools, the Philoptochos Sisterhoods, the Youth, the Hellenic Organizations, and the entire Greek Orthodox Family in America

Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Today, as we celebrate the blessed and holy Feast of the Annunciation, we hear the words of the Archangel announcing the good news of the coming of the Son of God for our salvation. We hear the response of the Virgin Mary in praising God and committing herself to His divine will. We hear a witness of her faith in God as she proclaims, *My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for He has regarded the low estate of His handmaiden.... For He who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is His name.* (Luke 1:47-49)

As we hear these words of the Archangel and the Theotokos, we hear the voice of Christ. Into a challenging and changing world, the archangelic messenger revealed God's plan to redeem us and His creation. In reply the pure and holy Virgin, filled with the Holy Spirit and inspired by the act of God to choose her, revealed the power of faith and grace through Christ. In this event of the Annunciation and through the voice of Him who brings us life, hope, and grace, we see how we can share the voice of Christ in our world today.

We sing in the beautiful hymn of the Feast, "Today is the crown of our salvation and the manifestation of the mystery that is from all eternity." In our worship and through our lives, we are the voice of Christ when we share this good news of salvation. Consistently and faithfully we announce to the world that God's grace has been revealed through Christ, that sin and death have been defeated, and the restoration of the divine image unto eternal life is offered to all.

We are the voice of Christ when we express our faith in the will of God through lives of holiness and obedience. Inspired by the example of the Theotokos, we offer this voice when we show our openness to His presence and guidance, when we commit to His ways in all areas of our lives trusting in His promises.

The power of the grace of God is also connected to our observance today of Greek Independence Day. Emboldened by their faith in God, inspired by the hope of liberty, and in honor of the many who had endured oppression for centuries, our forbearers sought grace and strength to pursue freedom, beginning their struggle for independence on the Feast of the Annunciation in 1821. These valiant people longed for the day when they could live freely, worship openly, and decide the order and direction of their communities as a Greek nation. While many had endured by the strength of God's grace, the time had come in 1821 to raise their voices for liberty.

Today, we honor the memory of our fathers and mothers and offer our thanksgiving to God for their perseverance, faith and sacrifice. We are also inspired by their heroism and their trust in God to seek liberty for all, and most importantly the liberty we find in Christ. We are His voice in a changing world. We are called to announce the good news of salvation and reveal the power of grace through our faith in Him. On this blessed Feast, may His presence and grace strengthen and inspire you to be witnesses of grace.

With paternal love in Christ,

†DEMETRIOS

Archbishop of America