



GREEK ORTHODOX METROPOLIS OF NEW JERSEY

ΙΕΡΑ ΜΗΤΡΟΠΟΛΙΣ ΝΕΑΣ ΙΕΡΣΕΗΣ

OXI Day 2016

The Very Reverend and Reverend Clergy,
Honorable Archons of the Ecumenical Patriarchate,
Esteemed Members of the Metropolitan Council,
Esteemed Members of the Parish Councils, Philoptochos Sisterhood,
Faculty and Students of the Catechetical and Greek Afternoon Schools,
Directors and Participants of all of the Youth Organizations, and all devout
Orthodox Christians of the Greek Orthodox Communities of our
Holy Metropolis of New Jersey

My Beloved,

Once again, we commemorate the day when our courageous heroes and ancestors stood up and opposed the forces of fascism that wanted to occupy Greece during the beginning of what would become the Second World War. Facing the military pressures of the Axis powers – the Italy of Mussolini and the Germany of Hitler, being on the forefront – the Greek people have demonstrated the same courage that Saint Paul experienced when he was put in jail: *“Be of good cheer, Paul; for as you have testified for me in Jerusalem, so you must also bear witness at Rome.”* (Acts 23:11) Their courage bore witness of freedom: freedom as a gift from God, freedom as the heart of human dignity, freedom as the only condition for genuine communion and relationship. Paradoxically, it is during times of war that we appreciate the importance of freedom. It is when freedom is in danger that we understand how crucial it is to struggle to protect it. This is exactly what we are reminded of today.

What we call “OXI Day” is a celebration of resistance and of freedom against the powers of Evil. I am convinced that the courage embodied by these men and women in 1940 and after is profoundly inspired by the experience of the life of the Church, by the experience of freedom in Christ. As Saint Paul once wrote: *“But now having been set free from sin ..., you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life.”* (Romans 7:22) As a spiritual community, we are all called to reflect today on the meaning of freedom in our lives not only as the blessed citizens of a Democratic country, where the liberties are guaranteed by the rule of law, but also as a spiritual reality. Freedom is more than doing what we want. It is more than an individualistic behavior, or even a selfish expression of our will. The Greek Philosopher Christos Yannaras beautifully

wrote: *"I must free myself from all those individualistic, egocentric forms of resistance. This is the only way to achieve freedom: freedom as love and freedom as knowledge. This is why the path to knowledge and freedom and love is the path of ascetic struggle."* This is also why Saint John the Theologian wrote in his Gospel: *"The truth will make you free."* (Jn 8:32) It is this reality of freedom that was protected decades ago in Greece: freedom goes beyond what we think. Freedom is simultaneously wisdom and peace, communion and relationship, as well as hope and grace. These pillars of our faith and heritage should become the ideals of life and community today, as they were the source of their victory against the fascist army, the resilience that led the people of Greece through the remainder of the war and its aftermath, until today's humanitarian crisis.

In our commemoration of OXI Day, let us honor the sacrifice of our ancestors, let us pray for those who stood up and said NO on October 28, seventy-six years ago, and let us celebrate their courage with which they defended freedom in the name of God and of Peace.

Praying that Almighty God continues to bless our Hellenic Homeland as well as all peoples who respect and cherish freedom, I remain,

With Paternal Love and Blessings,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Metropolitan Evangelos". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial 'M'.

† E V A N G E L O S
Metropolitan of New Jersey