



ΙΕΡΑ ΑΡΧΙΕΠΙΣΚΟΠΗ ΘΥΑΤΕΙΡΩΝ & Μ. ΒΡΕΤΑΝΙΑΣ  
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Archbishop's Encyclical on the auspicious occasion of our entry into the reverent and festive Period of 15<sup>th</sup> August 2016

Dearly Beloved in the Lord,

In a few days we will be entering the blessed and festive period of the 15<sup>th</sup> August. Monday, 1 August marks the start of the period of the fast and the Holy Supplications to Virgin Mary, whose Feast and blissful Dormition we shall celebrate on Monday, 15 August.

This reverent period of fast starts with the Progress of the Holy Cross and the martyrdom of the Maccabees. We, the Orthodox Christians chant during those blessed days in our Churches, the Supplications to Virgin Mary-except on Saturday and on the eve of the Feast of the Dormition of the Mother of God. The holy Supplications remind us of the prayer, our public and mystical communication with the Triune Worshipped and Glorious God, to Whose name and glory all prayer refers to. Those reverent days reminds us of the value of prayer and its significance to our life. As the Holy Fathers of our Church teach us, prayer is just as necessary as breath. It comprises part of our existence and that is why we continuously live with our prayer, either in speech or in silence, either through chanting and charity or through genuine love for our fellow brethren.

Despite being God, our Lord Jesus Christ used to pray every day and advised people to pray, teaching us the universal prayer '*Our Father who art in Heaven*', which is known as the Lord's Prayer. Coming back to the sacred chapter of the festive period of 15<sup>th</sup> August, I am reminding myself and others that in our prayer we have the Angels as our sacred messengers and intermediaries, as well as All Saints, the Prophets, the Patriarchs, the Apostles, the Confessors, the Martyrs, the Teachers, the Holy and the Rightful, who, by means of their tears and prayers sanctified the World, remaining eternal examples of faith and virtue in Humanity.

In charge of all those sacred Persons who through their life '*made earth celestial*' stands the Holy Mother of God, whose womb became the holy palace and the throne of the Only Son and Word of God. For this reason, the Christian Poets and Hymnists wrote innumerable hymns, religious songs to venerate the '*more honourable than the Cherubs and more glorious than the Seraphs*' in whose sacred womb the '*Word of God*' dwelled. '*And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling amongst us. And we have seen the glory, the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth*' (John 1:14).

Coming back to those sacred and reverent days of 15<sup>th</sup> August, I would like to stress the power of the prayer when it is made in true faith and deep humility. The holy poet beseeches: '*Lord, I have called upon you, hear me, hear me Lord, listen to the word of my prayer, because I have cried to you, hear my prayer, oh Lord.*' The same theme is repeated by King David '*Now convinced, I seek shelter in your holy providence and towards your protection I have whole-heartedly sped and kneeled before you, Virgin, and I lament and sigh, not to disregard me the wretched one, oh sacred shelter of the Christians*'.

Prayer presupposes Faith and love and the charity of God. The prayer to Virgin Mary and the Saints, presupposes our trust to the holy person whom we address and whose help we seek and ask for guidance and relief from the sorrows that torture us, because we are weak and sinful creatures. Through the prayer we become strong, hopeful and pleased, but only through the grace of the Triune God and His Friends, such as Virgin Mary, who was blessed with the unique honour to contribute to the mystery of the salvation of the Human Race. Under this sacred contention, the hymnist of the Great Supplication addresses Virgin Mary when he is tormented by the toils of life and his high duties towards the state of which he is the supreme lord '*A tempest of calamities has befallen me, Virgin, and squalls of sorrows sink me asunder, but reaching out your hand in time, help me, oh my dear conception and protection*'.

It is for this reason, my Orthodox brethren, that we are all called upon to go to Church and like Faithful pilgrims ask for the intercession of the Mother of God for all those trials and tribulations that torment my soul and body like bees picking on wax. Particularly during this period which is full of so much evil and wrongdoing that surrounds the young and the old daily – like the temptations of multi-faceted sin, such as terrorism and so many other wrongdoings that mar society and disassociate it from its holy character. We should ask for the protection of God and the intercession of the Mother of God with humility so that we can have peace with ourselves and others and be able to celebrate the feast of the Dormition of Virgin Mary Mother of God. To Him belongs the glory, the Power and the Kingdom in the century of centuries. Amen.

London, August 2016

Archbishop Gregorios  
of Thyateira and Great Britain

Note: To be read from the Pulpit instead of a Sermon, on Sunday 24 or 31 July.