

THE THREE HIERARCHS AND THE ECHO OF THEIR TEACHINGS IN OUR ERA

Dearly beloved in the Lord,

The Three Hierarchs and Ecumenical teachers of our Church – whose blessed memory is celebrated every year during those days – were exemplars of Teachers and Spiritual Shepherds of the Orthodox Church and were at their apex in the cosmos of Christianity around the 4-5th century AD.

Those Sacred Men were concerned with the Holy Bible, the teachings of Godman Christ and defended the Orthodox tradition according to which Christ is the Redeemer and Saviour of Humankind. Thanks to their deep faith and wide education, both ecclesiastical as well as secular, they stipulated the Orthodox viewpoint and the teachings of the Church regarding the three Dimensions of the Holy Trinity. Due to their Greek Education, they managed to formulate the great truths of the Gospel in an exemplary and divine manner. They theologized philosophically and philosophized theologically to win over the educated and the wise of their time. They stressed the value of the Greek Education and the Faith to the One and Only God ‘and Jesus Christ who He hath sent forth’ for the salvation of the Humankind.

They spoke and wrote powerfully and wisely on the love and benevolence of God towards man and led him into the knowledge of God and repentance. They taught the great value of prayer, supported frequent churchgoing and the frequent participation of the faithful in Thanksgiving. They turned their teachings into action by writing the texts of Divine Liturgy that today carry the name of St Basil and St John Chrysostom.

The profound prayers in the Divine Liturgy are classic memorials of religious zeal and sacred communication of man with his Creator. They underline that man has been made in the shape and likeness of His Creator and despite his fall, he is still the object of Divine Love and benevolence. They underline powerfully and wisely the presence of Divine Love which was ultimately expressed on Calvary and gained its full brilliance with the Resurrection of the Godman Christ from the dead. They expressed their overflowing educational universe through their sermons and self-sacrifice, which was revealed by means of the frugality of their life, their unmercenaryness, their care for the poor, the orphans, the widows and all those who are at the margin of society. It is not coincidental that the Three Hierarchs supported asceticism, and became monks to devote themselves to the Church and the dissemination of the Gospel to the World. The Orthodox Christians, and particularly we, who belong canonically and ecclesiastically to the Ecumenical Throne of Constantinople, have a duty and sacred obligation to honour their blessed memory, study their Orthodox teachings, emulate their example and fight just as they did for the eventual prevalence of the Divine Will in the World.

Before I bring this blessed memorial for the great pillars of Christianity to a close, I must refer to the uniqueness of the Institution of the family, the product of which were the Three Hierarchs. I would like to bestow honour to the mother of St Basil, Emmelia, the mother of St Gregory, Nonna and the mother of St John Chrysostom, Anthusa, who brought up in fear of God those Holy Giants of theology and Christian humanitarianism and who dedicated them as an eternal memorial to the service of the Church and of the whole of Humanity. I close this encyclical with a particular characterization for each one of them, as described by the hymnographer of the Church. For St Basil he writes: *‘To the furthest corners of the world your speech was heard and your word has watered the world; through this you devotedly discussed and the nature of creation you raised and the people’s customs you adorned’*. For St Gregory the theologian, the hymnographer writes: *‘Father Gregory, you were raised to be the mouth of theology, and dogmas of devoutness, and are presently addressing the world’* and for St John Chrysostom, he chants: *‘The unsetting star who enlightens through its rays the whole of the world with his teachings, the herald of repentance’*.

It is to our Lord Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd, the Great Hierarch, who provides everything for the progress according to God and the salvation of Humanity, belong the Kingdom, the glory and the infinite mercy in the ages of ages. Amen.

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