**Declaration of the Holy Synod of the Church of Cyprus on the 200th anniversary of the beginning of the Greek War of Independence of 1821**

**200 YEARS**

**SINCE THE BEGINNING OF THE GREEK WAR OF INDEPENDENCE OF 1821**

***The evaluation of the struggle and our own debt***

There are anniversaries that, despite the fact that many centuries have passed since they first appeared in history, still make our hearts bleed. Such are e.g. the anniversary of the Fall of Constantinople, and the anniversary of the Turkish invasion of Cyprus. There are others who in these difficult times have lost their meaning. But there are some who revive in us an unprecedented greatness, a national pride, that is unique and difficult to describe, because these are anniversaries that makes you feel that your nation served its purpose. March 25, 1821 is one of those distinctive anniversaries for us. Many centuries have been preparing this day. It was born out of long preparation, steadfast loyalty to the noble heritage of the race, devotion to the ideals of religion, superhuman efforts, and lengthy sacrifices.

Not long after the strike on the walls of Constantinople ceased, or the echo of the lament faded, Hellenism, with its eyes still red, was already establishing objectives and guidelines for a future expedition. And it did arrive, after four centuries of untold calamities, at the dawn of March 25, 1821. On this day our ancestors were tested before God and men. They showed their national identity and they managed to organize themselves.

March 25 is at the highest peak of our history, where the air is ambrosia. From there we can gaze back at the course of our race in the past. And we can do that with confidence. We can stand, without shame, in front of the other peaks of Greek life, which we will see from up there above. We can behold Marathon, Thermopylae, Salamina. We can greet Aeschylus, Heraclius, Palaiologos from there, without feeling inferior, without being humiliated by their great and sacred shadow. Because as then, so now, and even more now, the nation neither discussed, nor negotiated its freedom. And it preferred death instead of life without freedom.

The Greeks, thrown from the beginning of their history, on a bare and sea-beaten rock, in small numbers, in the center of a welter of ideas and people, with poverty as an eternal companion, fought with the rock and the sea, against insidious neighbors and hordes of invaders. Fighters in war and peace, they identified their name with the fight for human dignity and freedom, and they gave, theoretically and practically, precedence to the spirit and not to the matter. That is why anything brave and noble they created, in any period of their History, was not a product of a momentary mental outburst, but a product of the constant expression of their inner psyche. A psyche that expressed the epigrammatic formulation of Thucydides, in Pericles' Funeral Oration, "blessed are the free, and free are the brave".

So was the revolution of 1821. It was neither an action on the spur of the moment, nor a simple movement for the freedom of enslaved people, which is often encountered in the History of nations. For the Greeks, it emerged from the need for inner freedom of man, freedom of thought and action, freedom of conscience, and belief in certain inviolable ideals and principles formulated by the past and their Historic tradition. The Greek War of Independence erupted because this was required by the national idea, which had greatly expanded. For many centuries this national idea had nurtured the national consciousness of the Greeks, and urgently demanded its realization. Those for whom the homeland was the mother of the spirit, considered their utmost obligation to fight to the death for the prevalence of spirit in the world.

Besides, Jeremiahs never prospered in Hellenism. Babylon rivers, to hang their harps and weep "when they remembered Zion" did not exist, nor do they exist in Greece. In Greece there are rivers of blood and graves of glorious dead, the sight of which does not cause tears, but indicates the duty of revenge against national humiliation. That is why in the fulness of time, when the day came for the Greek soul to shake off the hibernation in which the lethargy of slavery had sunk it in, it proudly raised its head, straightened up its body, and roared like a lion. Enemies stood in front of it furious at first but subsequently frightened, and friends were dazzled by astonishment.

Our ancestors back then did not have the proper material preparation for war. They also knew the tremendous power of the Turks. And yet they rebelled against them, ready to sacrifice themselves for the paramount of ideals, freedom, which they knew is always acquired through blood. They were fully aware of their decision. It was either triumph and national greatness, or complete devastation and annihilation of the Greek nation from the forefront of History. And this fact inspired them. Since everything was at stake, they had to make every sacrifice to win. An entire nation was waiting for its great, historic moment. And when it finally arrived, the people gave their all without hesitation, without doubt, without fear, without reservation.

There is no doubt that the Church's contribution to this miracle of the nation's uprising was admirable and distinctive. Immediately after the enslavement, the symbols of the Empire were kept by the Church which preserved them, at all costs, during the dark ages of slavery. During these terrible and moonless centuries, the Church became the spiritual and national center of the martyrdom race. Every attack of the Turks broke out against its leaders. And it has been characteristically said that in many critical moments during the times of slavery, the national flag of Greece was supported by the clergy.

If we exist today as Greek race, it is because we held on the vestment of the Church all these years. We would neither find a beginning, nor an ending if we were to count and evaluate the national heroes of our Church, those who were sacrificed before and after the Fall of Constantinople, up to Gregory V and Kyprianos of Cyprus. All of them wrote in their blood the "beliefs" of our national-religious unity. Our History is full of bloody vestments, burned and demolished churches, shattered icons. For the enslaved Greeks, Orthodoxy was more than a religious doctrine. It was the spiritual context in which their national consciousness, their whole world was expressed, enclosing in it the glorious past and hopes of redemption.

Seriously! What would '21 be without the Church, without Krifo Scholio (underground school), without the clergy and the restless liturgical life? Undoubtedly, ΄21 would not exist. On the other hand, the heroism and self-sacrifice demonstrated by the revolutionaries of '21 were due to two main incentives: the love for the homeland, and the love for religion.

Two hundred years later, we gratefully evaluate the results of that epic struggle;

The nation at that time was in danger due to constant decay, and was being led to complete annihilation. The first achievement of the Independence War of '21 was the preservation of the Greek nation, as an established state now, albeit limited in size, with its main concern being to save its old tradition, and to continue the national Greek culture. At the same time, the Greek Independence War led to the overthrow of the Turkish occupation by other people of the Balkans as well, and in this way, the reduction of Turkish sovereignty in geographical range, due to the secession of occupied territories from it. Furthermore, it has solidified to the whole world the idea that any foreign domination is temporary.

This year's great anniversary of 200 years since the beginning of the palingenesis struggle must serve as a lesson on self-awareness for us too. A lesson in reflection and memory, drawing conclusions from the course of the struggle, and the adversities that arose in its path.

Shortly before his death, in 1816, Constantine Ypsilantis said to his son Alexander Ypsilantis: "My son, never forget that the Greeks must rely only on themselves to become free". It is the same that Theodoros Kolokotronis said, as he inferred from his life: "I realized then that whatever we do we will do alone, and we have no hope from foreigners". And indeed! A nation during its historical struggles for its survival must not rely on hopes of foreign aid. A stranger always helps himself first; and at any time, if his interest leans elsewhere, he will not hesitate to withdraw. One fights well when he relies only on himself.

Likewise in the case of the palingenesis struggle. Although some philhellenes were found, that intensified the liberation effort, who were enchanted mainly by ancient Greece, no organized aid from foreigners was presented. Whatever work was put in, was the work of the Greeks. 1821 was prepared by the Teachers of the Nation, clergy and laity, whom we today remember with gratitude. The effort was carried out by the entirety of the Greek people, young and old, men and women, educated and illiterate. In front of their graves today we reverently bend our knees and scatter the laurel leaves of honor, and the myrtle leaves of our admiration.

The anniversary celebration of the national uprising of the nation seeks to remind us that we are descendants of those who did great things then, but also whose work was left unfinished. We, the younger Greeks, have an obligation to complete this endeavor. Thousands of Greeks in Cyprus are still groaning under slavery, and under the threat of complete subjugation. What other meaning could the celebration of such an anniversary have for us, rather than the continuation of the struggle for liberation of our homeland too?

Besides, the great message that passed in the spring of 1821 over the Greek seas, did not leave Cyprus unmoved. It didn't leave any Greek heart indifferent, wherever it was. The dream with which so many generations of slaves grew older became a reality and those who lived during that time, considered themselves particularly blessed by God. The flames of freedom that first lit in Moria, which were fed with the blood of heroes and martyrs, leaped and poured unrestrained to the farthest Greek mountains and the farthest seas, and roused the Greeks.

This is exactly how Cyprus also received the big message. With its soul erect and its heart overflowing with excitement and emotion. Properly prepared by the constant contact with the Greek Metropolis, catechized by the secret teachings of the people of Filiki Eteria, but more than anything, driven by its own deep national feeling, Cyprus, from the beginning, demonstrated its solidarity to the national struggle for freedom, and its faith in the resurrection of the race that was certain to happen. Many were the Cypriots who helped in the preparation of the struggle, even partners of Rigas Feraios himself, and many others fell on the battlefields in Greece, "enslaved liberators of unredeemed brothers", as it was recently said.

Cyprus paid dearly for its participation in the national struggle back then. On July 9, 1821, from Saray Square in Nicosia, the indomitable Greek soul of Cyprus trudged through one more time, unfortunately not the last, between the gallows and the guillotines that had been set up, dressed in the crimson robe of martyrdom, and wearing a crown of thorns, to proclaim that the roots of the tree of freedom run deep and nothing can destroy them. And to declare to the whole world that in Cyprus the Greek soul did not and neither will it ever die out.

And today, despite the fact that the Cypriot land has been mourning for almost half a century now, and even though 37% of our land is occupied and contaminated by the Turks, and although our temples are being desecrated, and we are forcibly kept away from homes by gun threats, we gloriously celebrate the anniversary of our national palingenesis. Because we fully understand that only in this way, by experiencing national ideals and setting an example from the past, it is possible to achieve the liberation of our homeland.

In the peoples’ memory, the great events of their History stand as shining beacons to which the nation looks up to for inspiration, emulation, and to draw courage and strength from. For the Greeks the Independence War of '21 is exactly such a magnificent and luminous beacon. The Greek Revolution of '21 forges ideals, creates traditions, opens new spiritual and moral horizons, directs the flow of civilization, inspires people, raises people's consciousness.

We, the unredeemed Greeks of Cyprus, before anyone else must use '21's messages as an example. Four hundred years of slavery could not demoralize the nation. On the contrary, they were four hundred years of continuous preparation for the realization of its national idea. So let us not be discouraged by the suffering of 47 years of occupation. Let us hold on to our principles and ideals, and redemption will come for us as well.

"Show bravery, as tomorrow could be a better day".

*Holy Archdiocese of Cyprus,*

*February 11, 2021*.