

My Beloved Ones,

I write to you from the Phanar, that is the Patriarchate in Turkey. However, my mind is often returning to just over a week ago, when I was in Nashville, Tennessee, for the 43<sup>rd</sup> Biennial Clergy-Laity Congress.

When I think about this wonderful week, I remember the hospitality of the local parish of Holy Trinity, who worked so hard to plan this blessed event. I am still amazed at the impressive hotel complex—56 acres indoors, which hosted all our Philoptochos meetings, Hierarchal sessions, as well as the speakers who came to discuss the theme of the Congress.

And indeed, I have also been thinking about this theme a great deal, for it was a very awe-inspiring one: “You Are the Voice of Christ in a Changing World.” Indeed, the world is changing; and sometimes it seems as though these changes are frighteningly fast, and not always for the better.

However, last week those who attended the Clergy-Laity learned a great deal about how we—as individuals, as chapters of Philoptochos, and parishes as a whole—can be witnesses to Christ’s Gospel in these challenging times.

For example, the vital service work that so many of our National Chapters of Philoptochos have undertaken, are not simply humanitarian efforts; nor are they simply executed to make us feel better about ourselves: these unique donation drives, and many other activities are paying literal witness to our Lord’s reminder that *“whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.”* (Matthew 25:40)

I call upon all those who attended last week, both the Clergy and the Laity, to think about unique ways through which we can share the message of the Congress with all our brothers and sisters who were not able to attend. The Prophet Isaiah, in foretelling of the coming of the Blessed John the Forerunner, spoke of him as a voice in the wilderness. And after John’s death, as our Lord began his own ministry, he adopted John’s cry to the people, telling them that the Kingdom of Heaven is here and now.

Let us not allow the passage of time to dull our vital experiences into pleasant memories. Let us instead follow the examples of our Lord and his followers, proclaiming all we have heard and seen with love and with great joy.

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