



St. Christopher Hellenic Orthodox Church

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**Very Rev. Fr. George Tsahakis, Pastor
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Pastoral Message from Fr. George, September 12, 2025



As we commemorate the anniversary of September 11th, our hearts are already heavy with grief. We remember the thousands who perished, the bravery of emergency responders, and the sacrifices made to help our nation heal.

We also mourn the recent death of Iryna Zarutska, a young Ukrainian refugee whose life was taken in a

senseless act of violence on a Charlotte light rail train. And now, we are shaken once more by the assassination of Charlie Kirk.

Charlie, a devoted Christian, husband, father, and friend to many, was shot and killed while speaking at Utah Valley University. A single bullet to the neck ended his life in front of thousands gathered to hear him speak. The shooter, believed to have fired from a rooftop 200 yards away, remains at large. Witnesses described the horror of the moment, the panic that followed, and the deep sorrow that now grips his family and supporters.

To disagree with Charlie's views is everyone's right. But to assassinate him is a tragic violation of the very principles that uphold our democracy and our faith. Charlie believed in dialogue—not violence—as the bridge between differing viewpoints. He sought to engage, not to divide. His death is not only a personal loss to those who loved him, but a national wound that calls for reflection and repentance.

As Orthodox Christians, we are called to respond not with vengeance, but with mercy. We are called to forgive our enemies, to lift up the downtrodden, and to be peacemakers in a world torn by hatred. The Gospel of Christ does not promise us agreement—it promises us love. It does not demand uniformity—it demands compassion.

When we follow God's will—when we choose love over hate, mercy over judgment, and peace over violence—He leads us through the darkness into brighter days. His light does not merely illuminate our path; it transforms our hearts and renews our

communities. It makes us, in the truest sense, “one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.” In this unity, we find the strength to heal, the courage to forgive, and the grace to build a future rooted in hope and peace.

Let us honor Charlie’s memory by rejecting the culture of demonization that leads to violence. Let us teach our children that disagreement is not a threat, but an opportunity for understanding. Let us recommit ourselves to the sacred work of building bridges, not walls.

Let God Be Our Light, for Hope & Peace

A Pastoral Reflection on Unity & Compassion

+Fr. George Tsahakis, 9/11/2025

This title speaks to the divine presence we seek in times of sorrow and uncertainty. It reminds us that in the face of tragedy—whether the devastation of 9/11 or the heartbreaking loss of Iryna Zarutka—God remains our guiding light. His love calls us to hope, His peace urges us to act, and His image in every person beckons us to unity.

Today, we solemnly mark the anniversary of September 11th—a day of unimaginable loss and heroic sacrifice. We remember the thousands who perished, the families forever changed, and the unity that emerged from the ashes. In the face of terror, Americans stood together, transcending divisions to affirm our shared humanity.

We especially honor the emergency responders—firefighters, police officers, paramedics, and countless volunteers—who ran



toward danger while others fled. Their courage, selflessness, and unwavering commitment to saving lives became a beacon of hope in our darkest hour. In the days and months that followed, their sacrifices helped us begin the long journey of healing and

rebuilding. Their legacy is one of valor and compassion—a legacy we must never forget.

Yet today, we are also confronted with another tragedy—one that pierces the heart and demands our attention. Just weeks ago, Iryna Zarutka, a 23-year-old Ukrainian refugee who fled the horrors of war, boarded a light rail train in Charlotte seeking peace and safety. Moments later, she was brutally attacked by a man with a long history of violence and mental illness. Surveillance footage shows her sitting quietly, unaware of the danger behind her. Her attacker rose, pulled out a knife, and struck her fatally in the neck. Passengers screamed and scattered. No one intervened. No one tried to save her.

This image—of a young woman facing her killer alone, surrounded by witnesses frozen in fear or indifference—is a haunting

indictment of our moral condition. It compels us to ask: *What has become of our sacred duty to protect the vulnerable? Where is the compassion that once defined our national character?*

As Greek Orthodox Christians, we believe that every human being is created in the image and likeness of God. We are not strangers to one another—we are one nation under God. Our faith calls us to be vigilant in love, courageous in mercy, and unwavering in justice. We must not allow fear or apathy to silence our conscience.

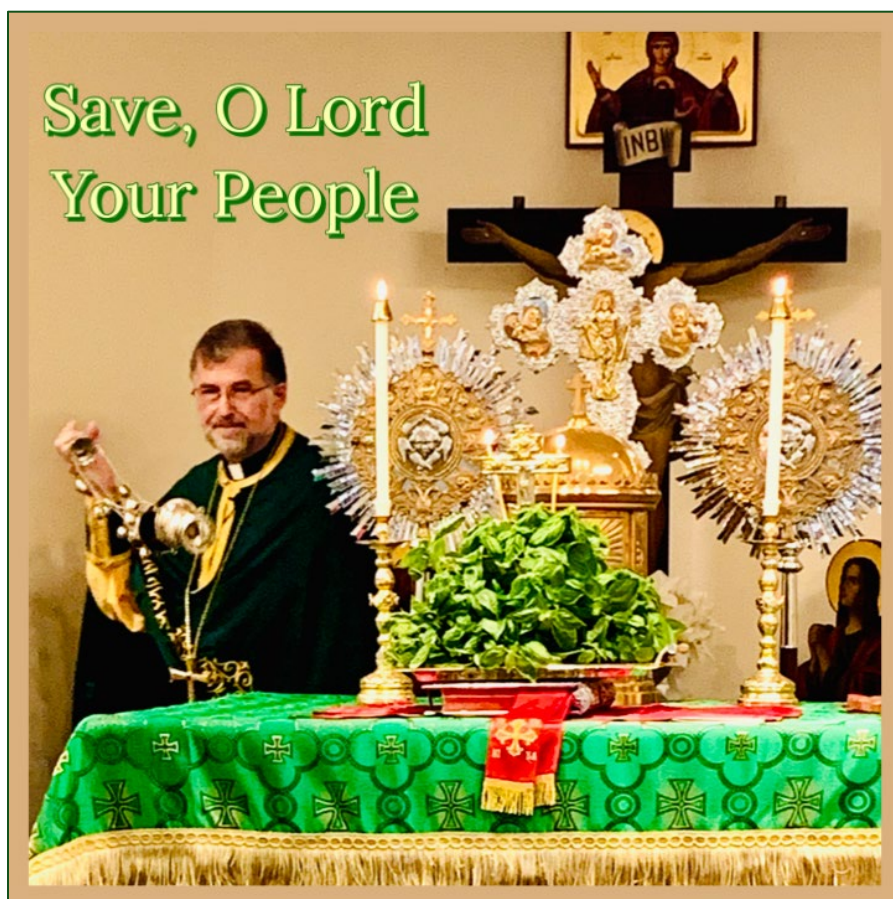
The legacy of this nation—built on liberty and justice for all—is far better than what Iryna experienced. Her death must not be in vain. It must awaken us to the sacred responsibility we bear: *to lift up the downtrodden, to speak for the voiceless, and to ensure that no one seeking refuge in our land is met with violence or neglect.*

Let us honor the memory of those lost on 9/11 and the innocent life of Iryna Zarutskya by recommitting ourselves to the Gospel of Christ. Let us teach our children to respect others, to defend the weak, and to build a society where love triumphs over hate.

And let us act—not tomorrow, but today. Reach out to someone in need. Offer a word of kindness, a helping hand, a prayer of support. Let your love share God's light that breaks through someone's darkness. In doing so, we honor the heroes of our past and become the hope of our future.

May the memory of the 9/11 victims and Iryna be eternal. May the sacrifices of our brave heroes inspire us to live with courage and compassion. And may our communities reflect the Kingdom of

God—where peace reigns, justice flows, and every soul is cherished. Amen!



Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

This Sunday, we gather in sacred assembly to commemorate the *Elevation of the Holy Cross*, a feast that calls us to behold the life-giving Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ—an enduring symbol of victory, hope, and divine love.

I warmly invite you and your families to join us in worship as we venerate the Holy Cross and reflect on its power to transform suffering into salvation. Let us come together in prayer and thanksgiving, lifting high the Cross that unites heaven and earth.

"Through the Cross, joy has come into all the world."

Let us rejoice in this truth and renew our commitment to follow Christ, Who gave Himself for our sake.

The service of the Elevation of the Holy Cross begins at 9:00 a.m., followed by the Divine Liturgy.

May the Cross of Christ be our strength and our peace.

With love in Christ,

Fr. George Tsahakis

Join Us Often with Your Family

Sunday, September 14th – The Elevation of the Venerable & Life-Giving Cross

(Wine & oil are allowed. Refrain from meat, fish, dairy, & eggs)

8:15 Orthros (note starting time)

9:00 Service of the Elevation of the Holy Cross & Divine Liturgy

11:00 Religious Education Classes

12:00 Parish Council Meeting

Wednesday, September 17th – St. Sophia & her three daughters: Faith, Hope, & Love

9:00 Divine Liturgy

Sunday, September 21st – Sunday After Holy Cross

8:00 Orthros

9:00 Divine Liturgy

10:45 Religious Education Classes

12:15 Philoptochos Board Meeting

Saturday, September 27th

11:00 20th Children's Medical Luncheon (Philoptochos)

