ORATORIO FESTIVAL SPEECH

FOR

SOPHIE LOGOTHETIS

Hello ladies and gentlemen, friends and family. You are **ALL** distinguished guests and you represent all walks of life. I am equally honored to speak to each one of you. Whether you are a surgeon or a scholar, a parent or a postman, a businessperson or a bus driver, each one of us is a human being and is entitled to the same rights and freedoms as the person sitting in front of us, behind us or next to us. It’s been fifty years since our parents and grandparents witnessed the birth and struggles of the American Civil Rights Movement of the 1960’s. What have we learned as a society? Have we learned **ANYTHING**? As Greek Orthodox Christians, how do we respond to the conditions we witness today?

As I prepared for this day, I did my research and of course saw the iconic Life Magazine cover that showed the Archbishop Iakovos standing side by side with Dr. Martin Luther King. There are several men in that picture and what I see is diversity standing united in a cause. I look back on how the Archbishop represented **ALL** Americans as he stood in support of Dr. King during the historic period of the march on Selma, Alabama, and the events that led up to that photo. Although the men were there to pay their respects to someone slain in combat of sorts, their look is united in defiance, strength, and yes, **EQUALITY**. That picture was taken almost fifty years ago. I ask again, what have we, as Greek Orthodox Christians, learned about humanity since then? Some say the movement began when Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat to a white man while on a bus in 1955. Some may think it began in 1954 with Brown vs. the Board of Education. That case fought school segregation. Or did people get **REALLY** mad when three young and innocent African American girls got killed by a bombing attack by the Ku Klux Klan in Birmingham, Alabama in 1963? Does it really matter? What matters is that our neighbors, friends, and extended family were treated as less than their white brothers and sisters. It’s almost hard to imagine what they went through. Times have advanced, but we all witness and hear of stories of prejudice every day and it is not acceptable in any way, shape or form. I look at the picture on the cover of that Life Magazine and I see men standing together, as equals, united in a cause. Each one **looks** different but they are all the same.

In Genesis 1:27, we learn, “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created him.” To me, as I look around, I believe that if God created man and woman in his own image, he is **EVERY ONE OF US**, no matter what we look like, the color of our hair, the depth of our skin, the length of our limbs or the size of our bodies. He is all of us and **EACH ONE OF US** is a reflection of the spirit of God. Who are we to judge who is more worthy than the next person? If we are human … and I am assuming everyone in this audience is (**Wait for the laugh**), then I think it is natural to question our place as well as another’s place in the world. I remember when I was \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ years old. I was at \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ and met \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (**tell a story of how you met someone and realized he or she is really just like you**).

In his famous ‘Letter from Birmingham Jail,” Dr. King wrote, “Let us all hope that the dark clouds of racial prejudice will soon pass away and the deep fog of misunderstanding will be lifted from our fear-drenched communities, and in some not too distant tomorrow the radiant stars of love and brotherhood will shine over our great nation with all their scintillating beauty.” Issues of racial prejudice may have been greatly reduced over the past fifty years, but what prejudice do you see taking place around you? Where do you see inequality and what is the next crusade that we, as Greek Orthodox Catholics, must take a stand? How can we serve the legacy of Archbishop Iakovos and find our fellow equals that need support? I know that in the spirit of equality, I will look at situations and people with new eyes and I will embrace my brothers and sisters no matter their race, beliefs, or standing in the community. Thank you all.