



February 26, 2009

**HIS EMINENCE METROPOLITAN ALEXIOS` REFLECTIONS ON THE BEGINNING OF GREAT LENT**

*Do not lose heart, O soul, do not grieve; pronounce not over thyself a final judgment for the multitude of thy sins; do not commit thyself to fire; do not say: The Lord has cast me from His face.*

*Such words are not pleasing to God. Can it be that he who has fallen cannot get up? Can it be that he who has turned away cannot turn back again? Dost thou not hear how kind the Father is to the prodigal?*

*Do not be ashamed to turn back and say boldly: I will arise and go to my Father. Arise and go!*

*He will accept thee and will not reproach thee, but rather rejoice at they return. He awaits thee; just do not be ashamed and do not hide from the face of God as did Adam. St. Ephraim the Syrian*

My dearly beloved in the Lord,

Now, on Forgiveness Sunday or Cheesefare Sunday, with the Forgiveness Vespers, our Church is giving us the opportunity to begin anew, to begin living a different style of life, with a different focus. Most importantly, we are to use the tools of worship, prayer, fasting, charity and repentance to enable us to build up our relationship with God and with our neighbor. All this is to encourage us to humble ourselves in order to begin to understand our relationship with God and each other. That's why in one of the hymns of Orthros on Sunday, we sing:

*"The arena of virtues is open. Let all who are willing to compete enter, girding themselves.*

*For those who genuinely compete will be deservedly crowned.*

*Let us do battle with the enemy.*

*Let us take on the armor of the Cross, having Faith as an invincible rampart, prayer as our breastplate, and charity as our helmet."*

All this so that we can center our lives ever more on Christ, in order to experience His love and mercy and enter into Paradise. Because our disobedience, pride, anger and failure to love - indeed all our sin - not only distances us our Savior, but also from the Body of Christ, the Church. But as we enter into the holy season of Lent, we learn that we should not despair over our sin, but persevere, using the tools provided by our Holy Orthodox Church.

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, let us not fool ourselves, for the time is upon us. If we use this time wisely, we will be able to find joy and blessings in this life while preparing for the next. As the hymnographer reminds us:

*"The time has come for the beginning of spiritual struggles, for victory against the demons, for the armor of abstinence, the comeliness of angels, and confidence before God.*

*For it was with this confidence that Moses communed with the Creator and heard the invisible voice.*

*Deem us also worthy of this confidence, O Loving Lord, that we may worship Your Passion and Your Holy Resurrection."*

As we begin our Lenten Journey to Holy Pascha, I pray that this period will be a time of reflection, a time of renewal and time that will allow all of us to be spiritually uplifted to truly experience His Resurrection in our own lives and hearts. Please accept my paternal blessings and love during this Holy Season.

KALI TESSARAKOSTI!

Paternally yours,

+ALEXIOS  
Metropolitan of Atlanta