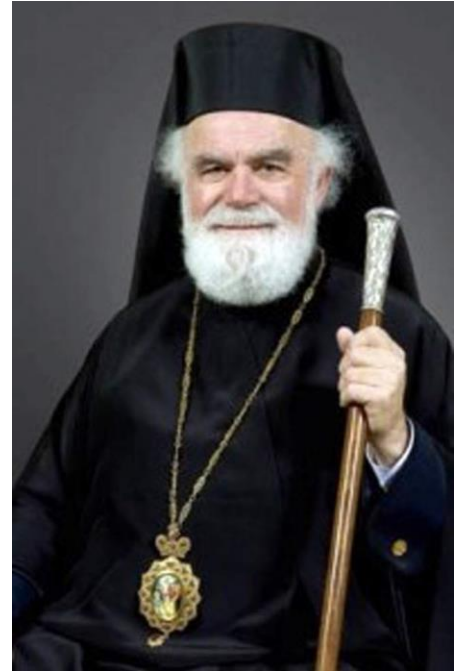


My Beloved Ones,

Today, I write to you from our Diakonia Retreat Center, spending time with our Faithful young people who are attending the 4th week of our St. Stephen's Summer Camp. In my recent reading, I came across this beautiful explanation of the benefits of prayer, which I feel is a great help to us all. According to St. Ephraim the Syrian,

*"Virtues are formed by prayer.
Prayer preserves temperance.
Prayer suppresses anger.
Prayer prevents emotions of pride and envy.
Prayer draws into the soul the Holy Spirit,
and raises man to Heaven."*

Truly, there is a great deal to learn from this passage. Beginning from the Saint's first statement ("Virtues are formed by prayer"), we can understand it to mean that prayer (which is one of the most personal ways to commune with God) is an entirely positive force. These virtues that St. Ephraim exclaims: temperance, suppression of anger, as well as preventing pride and envy, are all calm and peaceful attributes.



When engaged in true prayer with our Creator, consider that it is impossible to exalt ourselves physically. With our heads bowed and eyes closed, we approach our God, not just as subjects would a King, but as children would approach a Father: seeking and asking for assistance, as well as comfort and consolation. When we experience true prayer, we are surrendering our bodies, and in doing so, also our egos, and our troubled spirits. We acknowledge that it is a falsehood to believe that we can rely on our own understanding alone, rather than on the Will of God.

We become more aware of ourselves, and therefore, more temperate and peaceful people. If we have approached this moment of prayer whether angered at ourselves, or envious of others, these feelings must be overtaken by the peace and stillness that comes from taking time to speak to our Lord and God.

Having calmed ourselves of these various passions, we are now closer to God during the distractions of daily life. This peacefulness, gentleness, and forgiveness we encounter in prayer, are of course, fruits of the Holy Spirit at work in our hearts. And, having opened our hearts and minds to the Holy Trinity, we are, as St. Ephraim says, raised to Heaven.

I am pleased to be able to share this passage with you. In its plain language it outlines all the emotional, psychological states of prayer, finally ending with the goal of true communion with God.

I hope and pray that as we continue through these summer months, that you take these words to your heart, nurturing their message and meaning, as we all endeavor to grow closer to our Creator, day by day.

+ALEXIOS
Metropolitan of Atlanta