



My Beloved Ones,

This Thursday, we have the good fortune to be able to celebrate Thanksgiving. And while we of course look forward to the delicious food, as well as the warmth of family and friends, Wednesday, however, is a religious feast of great importance to our Orthodox faith; and not incidentally, one that is equally related to *eucharstia*, thanksgiving.

As I discussed before the Feast of the Nativity on September 8th, Saints Joachim and Anna were themselves so thankful to be blessed to receive a child in their old age, that they promised to dedicate their offspring to God. Therefore, when the Theotokos was three years old, her parents fulfilled their promise to God, by bringing her into the Temple, where she resided until she was betrothed to Joseph at the age of 12.

Of course, Wednesday's Feast of the Entry of the Theotokos into the Temple helps to prepare us by looking forward to the fulfillment of Virgin Mary's role as the willing Handmaiden of the Lord; but now, as it falls so close to Thanksgiving, I ask us to consider the depth of what it means to be truly thankful.

Tradition tells us that Joachim died when Mary was six years old and Anna, when Mary was eight; but perhaps some might wonder why those who prayed so deeply for a child, would be so willing to give that child up? The answer of course, is that Joachim and Anna recognized the reality that this child was not *theirs*, but that she was in fact a gift given to them from God. Joachim and Anna, in all their belief, understood that God had graced their faith, by allowing them to become part of something greater than themselves. Though they fell asleep before the Annunciation, in witnessing their daughter's Entry into the Temple, they were able to glimpse their own roles in His Divine Plan.

We too should follow the example of Saints Joachim and Anna, in making Thanksgiving a daily occurrence: not just a yearly one, with Thanksgiving; or even a weekly one, with the Divine Liturgy. Thanksgiving should therefore become a common exchange, by which we give back to God, just as freely as we are blessed to receive His bountiful gifts. As the Psalmist says, it is good to "*...declare Your lovingkindness in the morning, and Your faithfulness every night*". (Psalm 92:2)

Truly, it is my fervent hope that you and your families have a blessed Thanksgiving, full of warmth and love. Furthermore, it is my wish that each of us carry these feelings of gratitude toward God through the remainder of the Advent Fast, through the Nativity and the New Year, and indeed through each day of the rest of our lives.

+ALEXIOS
Metropolitan of Atlanta