



To the Clergy, Monastics, Archons, Sisters of Philotochos, & all the Metropolis of Atlanta:

My Beloved Ones,

I greet you in a spirit of love and fellowship, having concluded the annual Metropolis of Atlanta Winter Clergy Syndesmos, which we were blessed to hold at our own Diakonia Retreat Center. Fr. George Dragas' lectures on the nature of Priesthood, both in the Old Testament and in the early Church, were deeply inspiring, and I hope that our clergy have come away as uplifted as I have.

In fact, these lectures on the role of the Priest throughout history have come in my mind as I consider the Gospel for this coming Meatfare Sunday, which is of course, the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats. This Parable is well-known and is still relevant to all Christians, for in expectation of the Day of Judgement, we must carefully consider whether we have served "*...the least of these...*" (*Matthew 25:40*), and how we will answer the Lord on that Day.

Even in His physical absence from this world, the Lord does not fail to lead by example. We have not only His Commandments and the Gospels as guides, but our Priests as well. Lacking a temple in which animal sacrifices are made, the role of an Orthodox priest is no longer simply that of one who acts on behalf of the People (though this is true of the Eucharist and other Sacraments), but as a pastor: one who leads his congregation as a Shepherd leads his sheep, protecting them from evil and keeping them on the right path.

Truly, we as clergymen know that on the Day of Judgement, we shall be called to account for all those God gave us. To us, He shall ask, did we truly model His ministry? Did we feed and give drink to those who were hungry or thirsty? Did we welcome the stranger to our doors, clothe the naked, and visit the prisoner?

I say this not to boast, but with a true sense of gratitude at having such dedicated co-workers in this Vineyard of the Lord. All of humanity are sinful beings, but you, the laity, are each blessed to have individuals who have dedicated their lives, not just to their salvation, but to the salvation of so many others as well.

I thank each of our Priests for once again taking time away from their parishes, families, and many responsibilities, in order to reaffirm their belief in the work being undertaken by the Metropolis, and to strengthen their fraternal bonds with their brother Priests, and myself. As we continue toward Lent, may we offer a prayer to Almighty God for having called such loving Pastors to watch over His People.

**+ALEXIOS**

Metropolitan of Atlanta