



My Beloved Ones,

As we prepare to observe Καθαρά Δευτέρα it is important that we begin this Lenten season of humility and repentance in the right spirit; for as we read, “...if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father also will forgive you; but if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.” (Matthew 6:14-15) Just as our Heavenly Father continued to love His Prodigal Creation even after our disobedience in Eden, we are all called to begin Lent with a pure heart and mind.

When we have done our most to imitate the Publican and the Prodigal Son—when we have forgiven our brothers and sisters, and asked them for their forgiveness—we will be in the proper state to accept our Fast as that which it is: our preparation to undergo the events of our Lord’s Passion, Crucifixion and Resurrection.

Fasting is not, as Jesus tells His Disciples, a time to “...look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by men... But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, that your fasting may not be seen by men but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you” (Matthew 6:16-18). The purpose of fasting is not meant even to be a sacrifice. While we are “giving up” these foods, think about how much clearer the mind will be when we are not focused on great meals! Fasting is not something to be seen by others, but to help us grow closer to God.

All this is done to follow to take up our Cross and follow our Lord. “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal.” (Matthew 6:19-20) Meat and dairy will eventually spoil; all our material possessions will eventually pass away. Those things that cannot pass away—the things which we should search for—do not belong to this world. As our Lord tells us in this solemn, but beautiful warning, “For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Matthew 6:21).

Armed with these lessons on the proper Lenten spirits of forgiveness and fasting, I wish you all, Καλή δύναμη και Καλή Σαρακοστή! Good strength and a blessed Lenten Fast!

**+ALEXIOS**

Metropolitan of Atlanta