



My Beloved Ones,

I greet you with love and joy in the Name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, as we prepare to enter the second week of the Triodion.

Most Orthodox Christians are familiar with the Parable of the Prodigal Son, and how it represents our relationship to our Heavenly Father: we are also Prodigals, who may turn to sin and fall into despair; but our God, who is ever-loving and merciful, waits to welcome us home to the Heavenly Banquet table, if we repent.

This important element—free will—was a crucial discussion for St. John Cassian, who we commemorate this Sunday as well. During the Saint's life, a heresy known as Pelagianism taught that Christ was only a sinless man, and that since he was not God, human beings could also fight sin

without God's help. To combat this heretical teaching, St. Augustine of Hippo asserted the opposite: that Adam's Fall was so dangerous, man could do nothing without God. St. John Cassian demonstrated that the true, orthodox understanding of salvation was indeed a balance between man's efforts and God's grace. *"For the purpose of God whereby He made man not to perish but to live forever, stands immovable. And when His goodness sees in us even the very smallest spark of good will shining forth, which He Himself has struck as it were out of the hard flints of our hearts, He fans and fosters it and nurses it with His breath, as He 'willeth all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.'"*

It is fitting then that we commemorate both St. John Cassian and the Prodigal Son, for the Prodigal Son demonstrates the understanding of his sins and the intention to repent. Our Lord says that the Son *"...came to himself"*, which suggests a change of mind and heart, or *μετάνοια*. *"How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare, but I perish here with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me as one of your hired servants.'"* (Luke 15:17-19)

May we therefore honor the teachings of St. John, and like the Prodigal Son make a real effort, so that with God's Grace and help we too may be forgiven and welcomed into the Feast, not as servants, but as His faithful sons and daughters.

**+ALEXIOS**

Metropolitan of Atlanta