



My Beloved Ones,

I greet you with love and joy as we approach the end of the first week of Great Lent! This first Sunday of Lent is known as “The Sunday of Orthodoxy” when the veneration of icons was restored to the Church in the year 843, after decades of Iconoclasm. I pray that each of you join this Sunday’s commemoration by proclaiming what we know is Orthodox: that icons are tools to teach the Faith, objects to venerate the saints, and a means to witness our Lord and Savior in this life—before we see Him at His Throne.

This week’s Gospel serves as preparation for all that we are going to experience with our Lord on our journey through Great Lent—and beyond. The Evangelist John writes of an encounter between Christ, His Disciple Philip, and Philip’s friend, a righteous man named Nathanael. Nathanael knew the Torah, and so he was skeptical when Philip told him, *“We have found him of whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.”* (John 1:45)

Nathanael obviously expected the Messiah to come from David’s city, Bethlehem, when he asked Philip, *“Can anything good come out of Nazareth?”* Philip said to him, *‘Come and see.’* (John 1:46) Just as we become weighed down by worldly thoughts and matters, the Church says that Great Lent is a time to *“Come and see”* the One *“...who is and who was and who is to come...”* (Revelation 1:8).

When Philip brought Nathanael before the Lord, Jesus greeted Him, *“Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!”* (John 1:47) Nathanael was curious: how could Jesus know Him? Our Lord, revealed Himself as the Son of God, when He told Nathanael, *“Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.”* (John 1:48) Nathanael was naturally so astonished that he instantly proclaimed Jesus as the long-awaited Messiah, *“‘Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the king of Israel.’”* (John 1:49) Having revealed Himself, Jesus then explained that His seeing Nathanael under the fig tree is not as astonishing as what Nathanael will soon see. *“Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man.”* (John 1:51)

We too should be prepared for all that we will soon experience during His final week: the withering of the fig tree, the anointing by the sinful woman, the Last Supper, the Trial before Pilate, and finally, His Crucifixion and Resurrection on the Third Day. Beyond this year, however, we should be prepared to see, *“...heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man.”* As we continue to fast and pray, may we hold fast to the Truth our Fathers affirmed, so that we too will be worthy to stand before the King and offer our account.

**+ALEXIOS**  
Metropolitan of Atlanta