



GREEK ORTHODOX METROPOLIS ^{OF} ATLANTA

ΙΕΡΑ ΜΗΤΡΟΠΟΛΙΣ ΑΤΛΑΝΤΑΣ



My Beloved Ones,

In this week's Gospel reading, taking from Matthew the Evangelist's account of our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, Christ offers us some important words on the need to live a life of moderation & temperance, or *ἐγκρατεία*.

"No one can serve two masters," says the Lord, "...You cannot serve God and wealth. Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?" (Matthew 6:24-25)

Blessed as we are, to live in a country of plenty, where most of our needs are met, we must try to remember the time and place our Lord first spoke these words. His Disciples, the women who followed Him, are these who gathered to hear Him preach near the Sea of Galilee—these were not wealthy or

educated people. They were laborers in the fields, streams, and cities, who had children and families to feed. Perhaps some in the crowd did not feel Jesus was taking their needs seriously when He told them, *"...do not worry about...what you will eat or what you will drink..."* However, I am sure that after hearing the beautiful poetic truths He spoke, they understood.

"Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear?' For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." (Matthew 6:26:33)

After such a beautiful passage, it would not seem that there is much to explain: *But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.*" However, for the past several weeks I have thought much on the Ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle's writings on the great virtues. From his

Nicomachean Ethics we have 11 virtues, but I wish to discuss the one that applies most to this Sunday's reading.

You see, in Aristotle's philosophy, he developed what he called the Golden Mean, which is that perfect kind of moderate behavior. Taking our Lord's instructions as a starting point, we can find in Aristotle's view, that the excessive worship of money and earthly matters like food and clothing, leads to self-indulgence. Therefore, the Golden Mean concerning money is temperance: "*The temperate man... takes no pleasure at all in the things that the profligate enjoys most... But such pleasures as conduce to health and fitness he will try to obtain in a moderate and right degree; as also other pleasures so far as they are not detrimental to health and fitness, and not ignoble, nor beyond his means. The man who exceeds these limits cares more for such pleasures than they are worth. Not so the temperate man; he only cares for them as right principle enjoins.*"

My beloved, in this esteemed philosopher who lived centuries before Christ's Incarnation, we can see a true understanding of what is meant to strive after the Kingdom: to keep our bodies and souls healthy and well, living according to a proper sense of moderation and balance. Though our Lord's words were meant to direct and comfort a people who were hungry and poor, they apply just as much to us who live in a land of plenty. We, who can order our clothing, and even our food with simply one click of a button must remember that *life "...[is] more than food, and the body more than clothing..."* From Aristotle's list of virtues we can see that courage, generosity, friendliness, truthfulness, and a thirst for justice. are but some of the steps to guide us on a path to *theosis*.

Knowing this, we also should know that what our Lord says concerning our Father is true: if we live by these right principles, He will not fail to provide for faithful servants, both in this life, and in the next.

+ALEXIOS
Metropolitan of Atlanta