



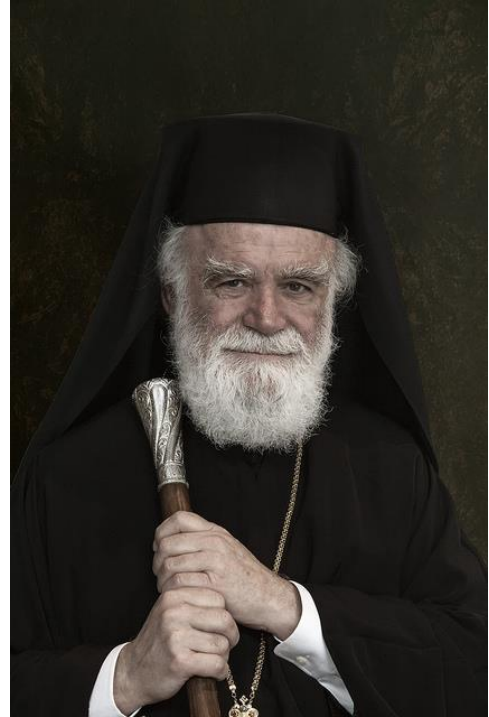
## GREEK ORTHODOX METROPOLIS <sup>OF</sup> ATLANTA

### ΙΕΡΑ ΜΗΤΡΟΠΟΛΙΣ ΑΤΛΑΝΤΑΣ

My Beloved Ones,

Having entered the month of August, I wish all of you good strength, as we journey together toward the Dormition of the Mother of God. In today's Gospel, we are faced with two great miracles: First, our Lord took pity on a group of blind men and healed them. Since Christ had begun to draw crowds wherever He went, after the healing, He *"...sternly ordered them, 'See that no one knows of this.'"* (Matthew 9:30) However, these men do not keep His request, *"But they went away and spread the news about him throughout that district."* (Matthew 9:31) Therefore, when *"...a demoniac who was mute was brought to him..."* a crowd had gathered, including a group of Pharisees (Matthew 9:32).

*"And when the demon had been cast out, the one who had been mute spoke; and the crowds were amazed and said, 'Never has anything like this been seen in Israel.'"* (Matthew 9:33) However, the Pharisees were not impressed. These men had devoted themselves to the Law of Moses, and now there was this stranger who ate with sinners, and who healed on the Sabbath. In their minds, they were honoring God, but hearing the praise the people offered to Jesus, their hearts became filled with pride and jealousy. They had spent their lives studying His Word, and so to justify their anger, they said, *"By the ruler of the demons he casts out the demons."* (Matthew 9:34) They knew the history of God's wonders, but the only way they could explain the miracles, without giving Christ the glory, was to make His power from the Devil. The sad truth is that while they justified themselves by twisting His goodness into evil, the good works they perceived in themselves were full of hatred, superiority, and judgement.



When we read the Gospel accounts of Christ's encounters with the Pharisees, we are not meant to read these as past history. The Pharisees may no longer exist, but their spirit of using God's Word to condemn is still very much a part of our fallen world. When the Pharisees criticize our Lord for showing mercy to the demoniac, or forgiveness to the sinner, we should instead look beyond the past, and examine our own hearts. Have we shown Pharisaical spirit when we judged another person, whether it is a friend, or a stranger? Would God recognize a spirit of criticism when we correct another's mistakes? After prayerful meditation, may we do our best to instead live like Christ: may we be open and welcoming, loving and forgiving.

**+ALEXIOS**  
Metropolitan of Atlanta