



My Beloved Ones,

This Sunday, October 3rd, we are blessed to celebrate National Church Music Sunday. The date has been chosen because it is closest to the Feast of St. Romanos the Melodist on October 1st. St. Romanos was a hymnographer whose chanting and reading were at first ridiculed by the deacons of Hagia Sophia. However, after being visited by the Theotokos in a dream, he awoke, able to compose and sing beautiful kontakia.

St. Romanos' story demonstrates not only the importance of church music, but also of humility. St. Paul writes in this Sunday's Second Letter to the Corinthians that, *"We have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies."* (2 Corinthians 4:7-10) Though St. Romanos

knew the world considered him unworthy, he was not given a beautiful voice because he wanted to receive honor, or to boast against those who mocked him; he was given this true gift because he only wished to serve the Lord in a spirit of humility. St. Romanos shed tears for the unkind words he received, but he cried not for himself, but only because he loved the Church, and wanted to honor our Lord. The Psalmist writes *"The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise."* (Psalm 51:17) St. Romanos, like so many of the Saints understood that to live in the light of our victorious Lord's Resurrection meant imitating the meekness with which our Lord went to His Passion.

We commemorate National Church Music Sunday after the feast of St. Romanos, not simply because he is the most famous Orthodox musician, but because it is this spirit of humility which all our parish choirs demonstrate. Our church musicians are not simply people who like to sing, but rather, they are devoted Christians who have chosen to serve the Lord and His Holy Orthodox Church through music. The famous Russian Orthodox composer Igor Stravinsky once said that *"Music praises God. Music is well or better able to praise him than the building of the church and all its decoration; it is the Church's greatest ornament."* On this Church Music Sunday, I congratulate all our choirs, and our National Forum of Greek Orthodox Church Musicians, all of whom humbly offer their time and talents because they believe in the importance of choirs that can encourage Orthodox parishioners throughout the nation and the world, in this greatest form of praise.

Our Creator has truly blessed us with faithful and gifted individuals who are zealous for the Church's greatest ornament. May the Holy Spirit, through the intercessions of St. Romanos guide and enlighten all those Musicians and Choir Members as they seek to do the will of God, praising Him with joy and gladness.

+ALEXIOS
Metropolitan of Atlanta