



My Beloved Ones,

The Gospels of our Lord Jesus Christ are full of necessary tools to uplift Christians on our journey toward *Theosis* and salvation; but I do not think it is an accident that the Fathers have chosen the Gospel of Forgiveness Sunday to be full of so many lessons, all of which we will need to strengthen us on our forty-day Lenten Fast.

As we prepare to observe Καθαρά Δευτέρα and the Fall of Mankind in the Garden, it is important that we begin this season of humility and repentance in the right spirit, for as we read, *“For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father also will forgive you; but if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”* (Matthew 6:14-15) Just as our Heavenly Father continued to love His Creation even after our first instance of disobedience, so too are we called to begin Lent with a pure heart and mind.

Having done our most to forgive our brothers and sisters, and to ask for their forgiveness, we will be in the proper state to accept our Fast as that which it is: our preparation to undergo the events of our Lord’s Passion, Crucifixion and Resurrection; it is not, as Jesus tells His Disciples, a time to *“...look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by men. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, that your fasting may not be seen by men but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you”* (Matthew 6:16-18). The purpose of fasting is not even to be a sacrifice. While we are “giving up” these foods, think about how much clearer the mind can be when we fast! Therefore, fasting is not something we do to be seen by others, but to help us grow closer to God.

All this is done to follow to take up our Cross and follow our Lord. *“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal.”* (Matthew 6:19-20) Meat and dairy will eventually spoil; all our material possessions will eventually pass away. Those things that cannot pass away do not belong to this world. As our Lord tells us in this solemn, but beautiful warning, *“For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also”* (Matthew 6:21).

Armed with these lessons on the true spirits through which we are meant to forgive, and to fast, I wish you all, Καλή δύναμη και Καλή Σαρακοστή!

**+ALEXIOS**

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