



My Beloved Ones,

I greet you with love and joy, praying that God will bless you and your families always, bestowing upon you good health, wisdom and peace as we approach the end of the first week of Great Lent! This first Sunday of Lent observes the Sunday of Orthodoxy, when the veneration of icons was restored to the Church in the year 483, after the many years of persecutions.

I pray that each of you shall join in this Sunday's commemoration by following the examples of your clergy and young people. Bring an icon of your patron saint and proclaim that which we witness to the entire world: that icons are tools to teach the Faith, objects to venerate our patron saints and a means to witness our Lord and Savior in this earthly life, before we stand at His Throne.

This week's Gospel serves as a kind of preparation for all that we are going to experience together with Him on our journey through Great Lent. The Evangelist John speaks of an encounter with Nathanael, a righteous man; but one who is skeptical when his friend Philip, a new Disciple tells 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 had read the Torah, and so when he heard Jesus described as being from Nazareth, he was naturally uncertain. Nazareth, and the surrounding area, was a humble country, and Nathanael obviously expects much from the Messiah when he asks Philip, *"Can anything good come out of Nazareth?"* Philip said to him, *'Come and see.'*" (John 1:46) Just as we may become weighed down by worldly thoughts and matters, the Church says, *"Come and see" the One "...who is and who was and who is to come..."* (Revelation 1:8).

When Philip brings Nathanael before the Lord, Jesus greets Him, *"Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!"* (John 1:47) Nathanael is curious: how could Jesus know Him? Our Lord, revealing Himself as the Son of God, tells Nathanael, *"Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you."* (John 1:48) Nathanael is naturally so astonished that he instantly proclaims Jesus as the long-awaited Messiah. Having revealed his purpose Jesus then explains his lesson to Nathanael: Jesus seeing him 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 witness; not just in awaiting the Lord's *Parousia*, but as we prepare to experience His final week: the withering of the fig tree, the anointing by the sinful woman, the Last Supper and Betrayal, the Trial before Pilate and the Crucifixion, and finally, His Crucifixion and Resurrection on the Third Day. As we continue to fast and pray, may we ready ourselves to be worthy, as one of Christ's Disciples, to see these greater things.

+ALEXIOS

Metropolitan of Atlanta