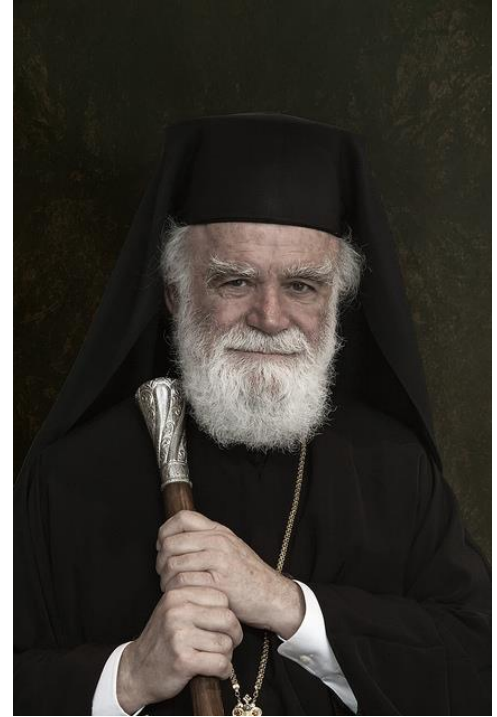


My Beloved Ones,

This week's Gospel is a profound and moving example of our Lord's love and forgiveness, and the hardness of man's heart.

We read that our Lord has come to Nazareth by boat. There, He encounters a Paralytic brought to Him by the man's neighbors. Moved by their love for the Paralytic, Jesus says, *"Take heart my son, your sins are forgiven"* (Matthew 9:2).

Naturally, this causes a scandal, for among the crowd are Scribes, who think to themselves, *"This man is blaspheming!"* (Matthew 9:3) Christ of course, as the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, knows the hardness of their hearts, and so He asks, aloud, *"Why do you think evil in your hearts? For which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Rise and walk' But that you may know that the Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins"—he then said to the paralytic—**"Rise, take up your bed and go home"* (Matthew 9:4-6)



The Paralytic then rises and goes home, leaving the crowd astonished and frightened, even as they *"...glorified God, who had given such authority to men."* (Matthew 9:8)

This reading asks us to seriously consider which of these groups we are to become. Are we like those faithful, who love their friend, and respect the Son of David? Or are we to become like those Scribes whose judgmental minds cloud their hearts understanding of God.

My Brothers and Sisters, this is the reason we have the Church as both an institution, and as the Body of Christ. The Church guides us towards closeness with God, helping us to keep His Word, glorifying Him through our thoughts and deeds as did the people of Nazareth.

I pray that we all receive inspiration from Above, health of soul and body, as well as the wisdom to not only assist our family and friends, but also to guard our own hearts.

**+ALEXIOS**

Metropolitan of Atlanta