

My Beloved Ones,

As we continue through the summer I have reflected much on two saints whose feasts we commemorate this month. Though these two young ladies lived many centuries ago, I believe they have much to teach us about the difference between power and faith. The first, is St. Marina (commemorated on July 17), and the other is St. Paraskevi (July 26).



St. Marina was born to a pagan father, and when the girl's mother died, her father entrusted her to the care of a woman, from whom St. Marina learned about Christ. Of course, this angered her father, who disowned her and had her put in prison at age 15. The local governor, seeing that she was very beautiful, wanted to marry her; when refused him, he condemned her to many tortures. When he attempted to drown the unbaptized Marina, the chains holding her broke, and she emerged from the water, glorifying the Trinity.

Over 15,000 people heard about this miracle and were converted to Christ. In anger, the governor delivered Marina and the crowd to a martyrs' death.

St. Paraskevi was also unlike many women of her day, as she received a very detailed education in all kinds of philosophy. Using her knowledge, she traveled throughout the Roman Empire, preaching the Gospel, debating with, and even convincing many pagan and Jewish philosophers of the Truth, which is Christ. Having escaped imprisonment, torture and death many times, the emperor grew angry, and one of his governors had St. Paraskevi arrested, commanding her to sacrifice food to the god in the temple of Apollo. Many thought that her faith had been broken in prison, but such was her belief that when she prayed to God, all the temple idols were destroyed. After much torture, hardship, and finally prayer, St. Marina also became a martyr.

Although they both lived in a pagan society which worshipped idols, these women discovered the true faith, which is our faith. Through Orthodoxy we too can understand where we come from, and what our destiny is during our life on this earth. When they appeared before the powerful leaders of the day, the Caesars and the governors, these women received strength from their faith, and felt very powerful, because of God's Holy Spirit, our helper.

In today's society we have many women who are also very strong and very well-educated. And of course, some of them are powerful in politics, business, and so on. But because faith is missing from their lives, they feel weak. For this reason, many have created means to seek honor or power in society, under the shade of equality and rights.

The difference between today and the time of Ss. Marina and Paraskevi, is that these women had strong faith, even to the point that they gave their lives for the faith. This is what I hope our children, especially our daughters, will learn from their lives: a person who has faith is a very strong individual, and a person without faith, no matter how powerful or successful they are in this life, is still weak.

May the Holy Saints Marina and Paraskevi intercede to God on our behalf.

**+ALEXIOS**  
Metropolitan of Atlanta