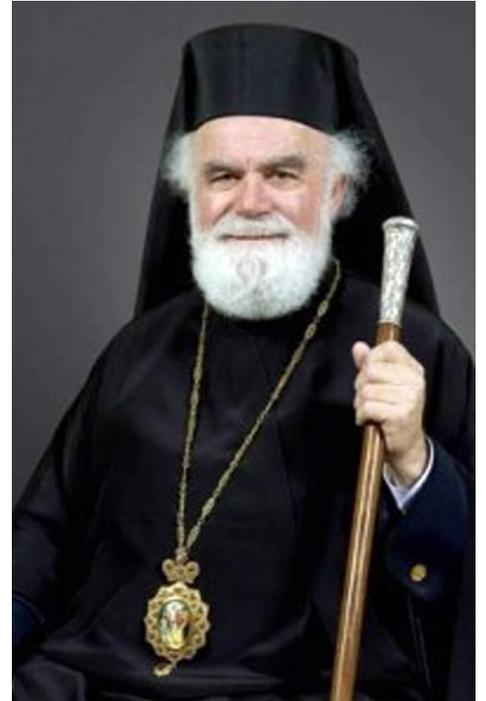


My Beloved Ones,

As today is the first of December, I wish for all of you strength for a good and blessed month. Καλό μήνα! In this month, of course we look ahead to that joyous feast of the Nativity, but the Church has also given to us the memory of two saints whose lives we are called to emulate on our way to the blessed Feast.

On December 4<sup>th</sup>, we commemorate the holy Barbara, a secret Christian whose father, Dioscorus, was a pagan. Dioscorus kept her locked away from the world in a high tower. Before leaving on a journey, he commanded that two windows be installed in his bathhouse. After his departure, Barbara asked that a third window be added, for the Holy Trinity. When he returned, his daughter confessed Christ, and Dioscorus prepared to kill her. However, her fervent prayers opened the tower wall, and Barbara escaped. Dioscorus pursued and eventually discovered his daughter, who was cast into prison and tortured. Such was the holiness of this saint however, that every morning, she would appear in perfect health. Eventually, Barbara was condemned to beheading and Dioscorus carried out the punishment himself. For the murder of his own daughter, Dioscorus was killed by a bolt of lightning. Barbara's tomb became the site of many miracles.



On December 6<sup>th</sup>, we celebrate the Holy Bishop of Myra, St. Nicholas. According to Tradition, one of the numerous examples of this saint's compassion and generosity towards the poor occurred when he learned of a man who, unable to afford a dowry for his three daughters, was faced with the possibility of their becoming prostitutes. Determined to help, Nicholas waited until night and threw bags of coins through the open window. From this remarkable act, the secular world has created the legend of Santa Claus and the act of children leaving stockings.

Though the act has become somewhat commercialized, but the Church understands we are to remember the true messages these saints give to us as we approach Christmas: the importance of witnessing our faith, even in the midst of fear and danger, as St. Barbara did; and to show Christ-like love and compassion, like St. Nicholas the Wonderworker, especially towards those in need.

We as a Metropolis are especially blessed to have two parishes named after these wonderful saints, and it is a privilege for me to be able to spend the feasts of St. Barbara and St. Nicholas in the communities of Sarasota and Tarpon Springs, Florida. Χρόνια Πολλά to all those who celebrate, and may we all take the lessons of these saints to heart, as we continue to come toward the manger.

+ALEXIOS

Metropolitan of Atlanta