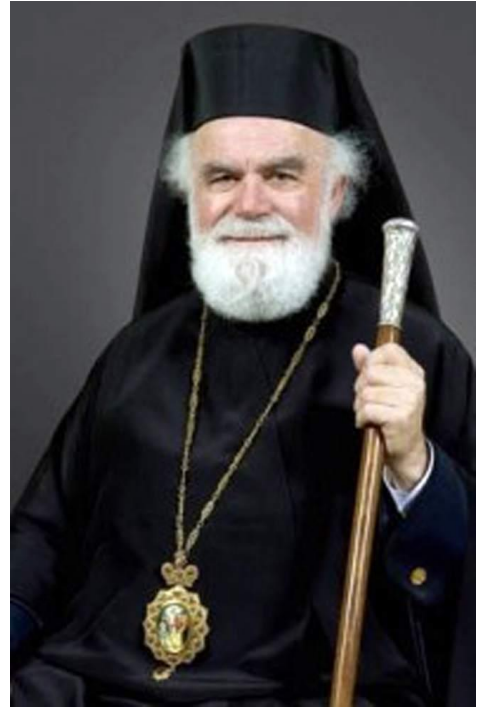


My Beloved Ones,

Nearly two weeks ago, the United States celebrated the secular holiday known as Memorial Day. This day includes the solemn practice of laying a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, to commemorate all those who gave their lives in the service of something greater than themselves. In a way, this national celebration resembles the upcoming final liturgical celebration of the Paschal season, the Sunday of All Saints.

Arriving on the first Sunday after Pentecost, the placement of this day on the liturgical calendar is full of meaning. The feast of Pentecost welcomed the Holy Spirit to the Church Militant, and in doing so, the fervor of God has been given to all, thereby increasing the number of His saints.

The Greek word for Saint, Άγιος literally means, “Separate from the earth”. We are asked during each Divine Liturgy to “put aside all earthly cares”, and indeed, this is a struggle that is central to our identities as Christians. For this reason, we have the saints as models, as pillars, to help strengthen us on our journey towards unification with our Creator.



While many saints who have witnessed for their faith are commemorated with specific feast days, the Church recognizes that there are numerous unknown holy persons who gave their lives to, and for, Christ, up to the present day. Indeed, it is a sober realization to see that the persecution of Christians has continued, especially across the Middle East.

Surely, we shall never know the identities of all the martyrs and saints—both past and present; and for this reason, the Church seeks to honor the “Unknown Saints”, as well as the known. Perhaps these saints do not have relics, or have not had miracles attributed to them. Even so, these saints are meant to inspire us.

They themselves have achieved reunion with God, whether as martyrs, or otherwise. Look to them in times of distress. Look to them in times of joy—for they are all present with us invisibly, whenever we gather together for Liturgy.

This Sunday, I pray that we will all take time to honor the saints. For whether they are known or unknown to us, they will continue to show us the way, so long as we are willing to listen, learn, and pray.

**+ALEXIOS**

Metropolitan of Atlanta