



My Beloved Ones,

During my time in Greece, I prayed in many places of devotion; not only on Mt. Athos, but also in Meteora, Mega Spileo in Kalavryta; Panagia Girokomeiou and Iera Moni Oimplou in Patras; and even my family's home chapel. I thought of you all constantly, praying for your health and safety, as well as for the health of our children in soul and body, as they begin a new academic year.

Now that we are all back in our beloved Metropolis of Atlanta, and as we continue through the Ecclesiastical New Year, I prayerfully ask that we use this new start to plan for the future, which can be accomplished by reflecting on our past endeavors, whether they were successful, or even if they could use improvement.

In the Church, we must always move forward with efforts to uplift ourselves, without giving in to pessimism. Pessimism, my brothers and sisters, is a negative trait, and one that belongs to the Devil, who does not wish to see us move ahead, or become spiritually "upgraded."

Having celebrated the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, we would do well to remember that it is by the Holy Cross that such schemes of the Devil were defeated, and that is through the saving power of the Cross that we are even able to undertake such spiritual work. This instrument of death, was, as St. Paul says, "*...a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God*" (1 Corinthians 23-34).

Let us put this symbol in front of our minds in everything we do—in our relationships with others, and in our own spiritual lives—calling upon our Creator to, in the words of the Troparion of this Feast, "*...save Your people, and bless Your inheritance, granting our rulers to prevail over adversaries, and protecting your commonwealth by your Cross.*"

My prayer then, for all of us, is that we continue through this Ecclesiastical New Year in a spirit of optimism, being kinder and gentler to ourselves, and to one another. The process of unifying ourselves to our Creator is a gradual and life-long one, and it is only by lifting up one another, under the shadow of the sacred Cross, that we can begin.

+ALEXIOS

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