



My Beloved Ones,

Tomorrow is that wonderful American holiday known as Thanksgiving. I am sure we are all looking forward to spending time with our loved ones, reminiscing and making new memories as we break bread together.

However, what I would like to address today are the feelings that will arise for many, as soon as the table is cleared, if not before. The increasing materialism of our society means that on the day after our family celebrations, many peoples' thoughts will turn instead to shopping.

While it is natural for us to wish to demonstrate our love with gifts and tokens of affection, I caution us not to become swept up in an atmosphere of possessiveness or greed. Instead of focusing on finding the best deal for the latest item, it would be better for our souls to continue to focus on that which is eternal.

For example, the monasteries of our Metropolis are perfectly aware of this natural need to produce things in order to maintain an appropriate lifestyle, but everything they produce is intended to uplift our spiritual lives and orient us towards our Creator.

For example, the sisterhood of the Annunciation Monastery in Florida produces beautiful incense meant to help us direct our prayers as the spiritual offerings. Likewise, the Paracletos Monastery in South Carolina, crafts not only incense, but a wide variety of different kinds of icons, as well as prayer ropes, and vigil lamps for the home prayer corner. The Panagia Prousiotissa Monastery in North Carolina has a wide variety of baptismal clothes, icons, and books for Orthodox people at different stages of their spiritual lives.

I hope and pray that as we continue to approach the Feast of our Lord's Nativity, we do so in a way that honors His Incarnation as an event of ineffable compassion and humility. I therefore encourage all of us—as parishioners and as individuals, as clergy and laymen—to honor our loved ones through equally humble gifts. In doing so, we will also pay respect to the men and women of our various monasteries by supporting their work.

May we seek to honor their commitment, not only by giving them patronage during this upcoming Nativity, but throughout the year: during our parish festivals for the year 2018, as well as baptisms, weddings, and other such blessed occasions. Think of all the ways in which we can be a blessing to God by supporting His chosen monks and nuns, as opposed to taking our business elsewhere.

My wish for all of you, as we approach the Cave in Bethlehem, is to approach every day of this blessed season as a new opportunity to grow in strength and love towards our friends and family, and to Orthodox Christians everywhere.

+ALEXIOS
Metropolitan of Atlanta