My Beloved Ones,

As we prepare for the coming of Great Lent, this Sunday’s commemoration of the Last Judgement comes to us at a time when our world seems to need it most. Reflecting on the current crisis in Ukraine, the world feels sorrow for those innocent people whose lives have been lost, as well as concern for its people.

Indeed, this Sunday’s Gospel comes to us in a moment, where the responses of the world are divided into the sheep and the goats. It cannot be too difficult to see that those who pushed for this conflict are like “goats”: they are those people who are so moved by their concerns, their desires, and their passions, that they forget the Greatest Commandment: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.” (Luke 10:27).

We read in the Gospel that when the King returns to judge the world, He shall tell these goats, “...You that are accursed, depart from me... for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.” (Matthew 25:41-43) Truly, those who began this conflict will deny any sin. They will use politics, or heritage, to justify themselves. Even more, they will claim that they are truly Orthodox Christians, and that could not have offended God by their actions, because their actions are righteous. In the same way, the goats of the parable shall answer the King in ignorance, “Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?” (Matthew 25:44)

Of course, we know the King’s response, “Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.” (Matthew 25:45) My brothers and sisters, no justification can disguise the truth: that those who have begun this act in Ukraine have allowed their worldly desires to so harden their hearts, that they can no longer see the image and likeness of God in their neighbors.

As the situation continues to change over the coming days, may we pray that the grace and peace of the Comforter and the Spirit of Truth shall move those responsible to seek change, just as we pray for the intercessions of our Most-Holy Mother and Ever-Virgin Mary to keep safe souls of those who been taken so unjustly, and for the safety and those who are still in danger.

+ALEXIOS
Metropolitan of Atlanta