



My Beloved Ones,

I greet you with love and joy, praying that God will bless you and your families always, bestowing upon you good health, wisdom, peace, and spiritual strength as we approach the end of the first week of Great Lent!

This first Sunday of Great Lent observes the Sunday of Orthodoxy, when the veneration of icons was restored to the Church in the year 483, after the many years of iconoclastic persecutions.

From the beginning of creation itself we hear God say, “*Let us make man in our image, after our likeness*” (*Genesis 1:26*). Therefore it is understandable that Man would hunger for ways to reflect the divine, and the holiness of His saints. The negative side of this feeling, of course led to the Israelites worshipping the Golden Calf during their

wanderings in the desert. A consequence of this paganism gave rise to the Second Commandment “*Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image.*” The nature of this Commandment is that which gave, and still gives many Christians, the mistaken belief that icons are idols.

However, even comparing icons to honoring those we love through photographs, fails to capture the wish to know God. Only the holiest people have been blessed to witness our Lord in this life; and no person will ever be able to understand God with their mind. God Himself recognizes this; for if He did not, His Son would not have taken on our flesh.

Christ came to earth in the form of a human being, who is Himself an icon of the living God. God walked, talked, lived and breathed among His people. Our Apostolic Church has its roots firmly established in those Apostles who broke bread with the Second Person of the Holy Trinity.

Therefore, we celebrate the restoration of the icons this Sunday, and honor those who fought and died for their restoration. I pray that each of you shall join in this Sunday’s commemoration by following the examples of your clergy and young people. Bring an icon of your patron saint and proclaim that which we witness to the entire world: that icons are tools to teach the Faith, objects to venerate our patron saints and feast days, and, perhaps, most of all, a means to witness our Lord and Savior in this earthly life, before we stand at His Throne.

+ALEXIOS
Metropolitan of Atlanta