My Beloved Ones,

This Sunday we shall join the joyful children of Jerusalem who welcome our Lord, waving palm branches, and singing, “ Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!” (John 12:13) Palm Sunday is a day of joy as we prepare for a week of spiritual struggle, because we Orthodox understand that through His entry into Jerusalem, the Son of God takes His final steps towards both, His voluntary Passion, and His salvific Resurrection.

Though the Apostle Paul was not a Disciple during Christ’s ministry, his Epistle to the Philippians shares in the brightness of this day, when He tells the Church in Philippi: “Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near” (Philippians 4:4-5).

Indeed, the Lord is near on this Palm Sunday, as we are asked to share in the joy of the children of Jerusalem, bearing our palm crosses and welcoming Him into our hearts. Though we know that the coming Holy Week will take us to the foot of the Cross on Golgotha, now we are meant to take comfort and strength in the knowledge that this Sunday is a taste of Christ’s triumphant Resurrection.

We should follow the Apostle Paul’s counsel to the Philippians: “Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving... The peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:6-7). The events of the Last Supper, Christ’s Betrayal, and His Crucifixion will test our souls and hearts, but “…brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you” (Philippians 4:8-9).

My Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ, may we begin Holy Week by thinking on the good things, focusing on the lovely, excellent, and praiseworthy, so that we may remain strong during the events of Holy Week, and ready to welcome that Feast of Feasts, Pascha.

+ALEXIOS
Metropolitan of Atlanta