My Beloved Ones,

I greet you with love and joy in the name of our Risen Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ! ΧΡΙΣΤΟΣ ΑΝΕΣΘΗ! Christ is Risen! This Sunday, we are blessed to remember a great saint of Orthodoxy, one who was important to the growth of monasticism throughout the world.

St. Pachomios the Great was born near the end of the 3rd century, in Egypt. The son of pagan parents, he found himself forced into serving in the Roman army. New recruits who were kidnapped from their homes were often lodged, at first, in a prison. It was in this prison that St. Pachomios first discovered the love of Christ, when he saw the behavior of those Christians who came and brought food and drink for the new recruits. Moved by their selflessness, St. Pachomios vowed that after ending his military service (during which he never used a weapon), he would be baptized, and then dedicate his life to Christ.

He first studied with a local hermit named Palaemon, for seven years, and then with St. Anthony the Great—until he heard a voice tell him to build a place where hermits would come and live together. Until this point, in the early 4th century, most of Christian monasticism had consisted of the eremitic style: that is to say, each monk or nun would live in the wilderness (in Greek, ἔρημος) in their own individual cell, only coming together for Divine Liturgy). Though Pachomios did not “invent” cenobitic monasticism, we consider him its “Father”, because he developed a structure of taking small communities, and bringing them together under a very structured Rule. Each monk was given the same amount of food and clothing, and each monk was allowed to determine their fasting and work based on their own spiritual and physical strength. Knowing that many hermits would react negatively, as he organized this new cenobitic style (meaning the common life), St. Pachomios took on the burden of the administration himself.

Eventually, this monastery grew so large that another was founded. Such was St. Pachomios’s humility that he refused St. Anthony’s wish to ordain him as a Priest. By the end of his earthly life, he had founded eight monasteries which followed his Rule. From this Rule order, he inspired both St. Basil when he wrote his Rule, and also St. Benedict of Nursia, whose Rule governs Roman Catholic monasticism. In this way, despite the differences found in these churches, we can see that we do indeed share a common “Abba”, “Abbot”, or “Father”.

Though few are called to monasticism, all our lives have been made richer through the example of this holy man. St. Pachomios took the negativity of being separated from his homeland, and rather than falling into despair, he used his experiences living together with his fellow soldiers in the military, to teach others how to instead serve our Heavenly Commander, who is God.

+ALEXIOS
Metropolitan of Atlanta