My Beloved Ones,

Throughout Christ’s Ministry we see examples of Rich Young Men who are unable to fulfill our Lord’s command: “...If you wish to be perfect, go, sell your possessions, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.” (Matthew 19:21) This Sunday, our Church remembers a great Saint who was able to demonstrate these qualities, and during our Lord’s Passion, no less; this Saint is, of course, Joseph of Arimathea.

Through his love and devotion to our Lord, we know that St. Joseph fulfilled a part of Isaiah’s prophecy, which said that the suffering Messiah would be buried in a rich man’s tomb (Isaiah 53:9). However, we do not remember St. Joseph simply because he gave his own tomb to bury our Lord. St. Joseph not only gave much, but also stood to lose much in the eyes of the world. The Gospel of Mark tells us not only that Joseph “...went boldly to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus”, but firstly that St. Joseph was “...a respected member of the council, who was also himself waiting expectantly for the kingdom of God” (Mark 15:43). Now, let us imagine his pain to see his respected peers and elders plot against the Christ for whom they had long waited. He (and Nicodemos) knew that he could do nothing to stop God’s salvific plan; but instead of going into hiding—like almost all the other Disciples—after Christ gave up his spirit, St. Joseph boldly stepped forward and declared that he too was a Christian, by asking for Christ’s body.

I ask us to consider St. Joseph example by reflecting on what sort of love we have for our Lord. Indeed, it is very easy to say, “Yes, I am a believer, and I hope for eternal life.” However, do we love Christ because of our promised rewards, or do we love Him as St. Joseph did? I pray that we remember to demonstrate our love for Him through loving others: calling our friends and loved ones to offer comfort and joy in times of distress, or assisting those who are in need, with acts of charity and mercy. The true test, as Jesus said in His Sermon on the Mount, is to: “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you... For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? (Matthew 5:44; 46-47) Even after the Resurrection and Ascension of our Lord, when his fellow members of the Council banished St. Joseph from Jerusalem, he did not despair, or give in to the temptation of hatred, but continued to live joyfully, spreading the Gospel even as far as Great Britain.

Truly, if we serve all—enemies and friends, both, then we will be living out Christ’s Gospel, just like St. Joseph. We do this, not for vanity, but because, if a respected rich man could risk his life for his Lord and God, how much more could we do, who continue to live in shelter and peace?

+ALEXIOS
Metropolitan of Atlanta