My Beloved Ones,

This Monday, we are fortunate to be able to celebrate the great Feast of the Dormition of the Mother of God. Beyond blessing those named in honor of the Theotokos (Panagiotis, Despina, and Maria), this day is a special feast for all Orthodox Christians, because it demonstrates how we should not fear death, but trust in the Lord.

Let us think on the life of our beloved ever-Virgin Mary, and how her whole being demonstrated trust in God’s guidance. From the very beginning, her parents, Saints Joachim and Anna, showed respect for God and His gifts by offering their daughter to the Temple. Raised as a pious young woman, Mary consented to become the vessel of our Lord’s Incarnation, praising God and saying, “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name.” (Luke 1:47-49) Even when Simeon prophesied Mary’s sorrow at the Crucifixion, she continued to trust in God’s salvific plan, never doubting Him.

Therefore, when Holy Tradition describes the visit of the angel who prepared the Theotokos to expect her Dormition, we read that, “On hearing this, she went up with haste to the Mount of Olives, where she prayed continuously. Giving thanks to God, she returned to her house and prepared whatever was necessary for her burial.” She did not weep or mourn in the human understanding; she felt great joy and turned to God in unceasing prayer. Truly, her behavior is a model for us all. Where we imperfect human beings have been disobedient to our Lord, we can at least imitate her in our thoughts concerning the passage from this life to the next. The Theotokos knew the Orthodox understanding of death: that death is not the closing of a door, but the opening of another, through which our soul passes to eternity.

Though few of us will have the spiritual practice of the Theotokos’s years in the Temple as long as we live righteously, loving God, & our neighbor as ourselves, may we instead think of our future as a joyful beginning, rather than a sad ending. To all those who celebrate today, I wish you Χρόνια πολλά! May our Panagia continue to intercede to Her Son, so that we will all be counted worthy to greet her in God’s Kingdom.

+ALEXIOS
Metropolitan of Atlanta