



My Beloved Ones,

This Sunday, October 2nd, we are blessed to celebrate National Church Music Sunday. The date has been chosen because it is closest to the Feast of St. Romanos the Melodist on October 1st. St. Romanos' story demonstrates not only the importance of church music, but also of humility, for he was a hymnographer whose chanting and reading were ridiculed by the deacons of Hagia Sophia. Though St. Romanos knew the world considered him unworthy, he was visited by the Theotokos in a dream, and when he awoke, he was able to compose and sing beautiful kontakia. However, he was not given a beautiful voice because he wanted to boast against those who mocked him: he was given this true gift only because he only wished to serve the Lord in a spirit of humility.

As Christ teaches His Disciples in this Sunday's Gospel, *"Do to others as you would have them do to you. If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. If you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again. But love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful."* (Luke 6:31-36) St. Romanos shed tears for the unkind words he received, but he cried not for himself, but only because he loved the Church, and wanted to honor our Lord. The Psalmist writes *"The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise."* (Psalm 51:17) St. Romanos understood that to live in the light of our victorious Lord's Resurrection meant that we should imitate the meekness with which our Lord went to His Passion, asking His Heavenly Father to forgive those who persecuted Him.

We commemorate National Church Music Sunday after the feast of St. Romanos, not simply because he is the most famous Orthodox musician, but because it is this spirit of humility which all our parish choirs demonstrate. Our church musicians are not simply people who like to sing, but rather, they are devoted Christians who have chosen to serve the Lord and His Holy Orthodox Church through music. The famous Russian Orthodox composer Igor Stravinsky once said that *"Music praises God. Music is well or better able to praise him than the building of the church and all its decoration; it is the Church's greatest ornament."* On this Church Music Sunday, I congratulate all our choirs, and our National Forum of Greek Orthodox Church Musicians, all of whom humbly offer their time and talents because they believe in the importance of choirs that can encourage Orthodox parishioners throughout the nation and the world, in this greatest form of praise.

Our Creator has truly blessed us with faithful and gifted individuals who are zealous for the Church's greatest ornament. May the Holy Spirit, through the intercessions of St. Romanos guide and enlighten all those Musicians and Choir Members as they seek to do the will of God, praising Him with joy and gladness.

+ALEXIOS
Metropolitan of Atlanta