



My Beloved Ones,

Next week, our Clergy will gather together at our beloved Diakonia Retreat Center for our Fall Metropolis Clergy Retreat. Following this, our Holy Unmercenaries Medical Society will spend the weekend discussing various spiritual practices like prayer, patience, and faith, especially in the context of the practice of medicine. The dates of these retreats were not selected at random, for this Monday we will celebrate the Feast Day of the Unmercenary brothers, Sts. Cosmas and Damian of Arabia.

The holy brothers Cosmas and Damian were physicians in Arabia, who traveled through the cities and the villages, preaching Christ, and healing the sick without any payment, for this is what it means to be unmercenary, remembering Christ's instruction to the Disciples, "*Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. You received without payment; give without payment*" (Matthew 10:8). In Cilicia (now in present-day Turkey), pagans seized the holy physicians and led them

before the governor. Since they refused to renounce Christ, the governor ordered the saints to be beaten, and then cast into the sea. An angel of God rescued them and brought them to shore, where the pagans beheaded the saints.

In this Sunday's Gospel, we read that "*A sower went out to sow his seed; and as he sowed, some fell on the path and was trampled on, and the birds of the air ate it up. Some fell on the rock; and as it grew up, it withered for lack of moisture. Some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew with it and choked it. Some fell into good soil, and when it grew, it produced a hundredfold... The ones on the path are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts... The ones on the rock are those who, when they hear the word...have no root... and in a time of testing fall away... among the thorns, these are the ones who hear; but as they go on their way, they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature. But as for that in the good soil, these are the ones who, when they hear the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patient endurance.*" (Luke 8:5-8; 12-15) We take strength and comfort in the fact that unlike those seeds which fall on rocks and into thorns, God and Orthodoxy will always triumph because of these Saints who gave everything they had, both their skills, and even their lives.

When we read this parable, the question we are meant to ask ourselves is how often do we allow ourselves to become other kinds of seeds, and how can we keep our endurance, so that our hearts remain honest and good? We may not be able to give of our skills so freely, and we may not be called to give our lives, but we must do our best to imitate the lives of the Unmercenary Saints, as we keep our hearts and minds directed toward Christ, rather than the riches and pleasures of the world. Only then, will we be able to bear the fruits of the spirit which are worthy of those called Christians.

**+ALEXIOS**

Metropolitan of Atlanta