My Beloved Ones,

This Sunday our Church commemorates James the Just, the brother of our Lord. James is understood to be the stepbrother of Jesus (as Joseph’s son from a previous marriage). Despite the fact that the village of Nazareth rejected our Lord, James did not abandon his kinsman, but became a faithful Disciple, and the first Bishop of the Jerusalem.

He became known as James the Just for the mercy and wisdom with which he guided his flock. Even among those Jews who did not accept Christ as the long-awaited Messiah, James was admired for his bravery and leadership. We even read in this week’s letter from St. Paul to the Galatians, that after he came to Christ, out of repentance, he “…did not confer with flesh and blood, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia; and again I returned to Damascus. Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas, and remained with him fifteen days. But I saw none of the other apostles except James the Lord’s brother.” (Galatians 1:17-19) Even from this brief mention of James, we can understand that James was a respected member of the Church, and a person whose judgement concerning the former persecutor would be considered important for the Church to accept St. Paul as a member.

Much like his brother, St. James underwent martyrdom at the hands of the powerful. When James began to preach the Gospel at the Temple during Passover, Holy Tradition tells us that, “On hearing this testimony, many of those present cried, ‘Hosanna to the Son of David.’ But the Scribes and Pharisees cried, ‘So, even the just one hath been led astray,’ and at the command of Ananias the high priest, the Apostle was cast down...then was stoned, and while he prayed for his slayers, his head was crushed by the wooden club wielded by a certain scribe.”

My beloved ones, when we commemorate the life and martyrdom of this wise and just saint, we remember a person who did not use his relationship to the Lord to boast or to find favor with others, but instead, imitated Christ’s example. This Sunday, let us ask ourselves, how could we become known as “the Just”? How can we become respected and loved by our friends and neighbors? Are we generous enough to pray for those who harm us and attack us falsely? May we pray to God for the strength and wisdom, through the intercessions of St. James.

+ALEXIOS
Metropolitan of Atlanta