



My Beloved Ones,

Tomorrow is that wonderful American holiday known as Thanksgiving, and I am certain that you are also looking forward to spending time with your loved ones, reflecting on past times, and making new memories while you break bread together.

While there is a tendency in our modern society to emphasize the material comforts of the holiday—the delicious food, the entertainment, and even early Christmas shopping—we Orthodox Christians know that the act of thanksgiving is not just a single day of celebration, it is the heart of our worship. The Eucharist, the most important sacrament, the act of communion with our Creator, comes from the Greek word for Thanksgiving, εὐχαριστία. We are even more aware that being thankful is not just a weekly practice during Sunday's Divine Liturgy: it should be a daily occurrence. As the Psalmist says, it is good to

"...declare Your lovingkindness in the morning, and Your faithfulness every night"
(Psalm 92:2).

However, this is not always so. Many times, during personal difficulties, it can become tempting to forget this spirit of gratitude, or even to blame God. This is not how we are meant to see our place in the *cosmos*, however. We must always hold fast to the feeling of gratitude. We should remind ourselves that God has granted us the ability to witness each day, in order that we might help to accomplish His Will, and to enjoy the good things in life. When we do our best to live in this spirit of gratitude and humility all year long, we may be amazed to see that the world itself will appear to be full of hope and good things, rather than negative feelings and influences.

This style of life is not only healthier for both ourselves and our fellow human beings, but by demonstrating this positivity, in some small way, we grow closer to our goal of *theosis*, because now we can see the world as our loving God sees us: as beings created in His image and likeness, all of whom are worthy of love and salvation.

Therefore, it is once again my fervent hope that you and your families have a blessed Thanksgiving, full of warmth and love, as you seek to live in more positive ways. Furthermore, it is my wish that each of us carry these feelings of gratitude toward God through the remainder of the Advent Fast, through the Nativity and the New Year, and indeed through each day of the rest of our lives.

God be with you, and with us all.

+ALEXIOS
Metropolitan of Atlanta