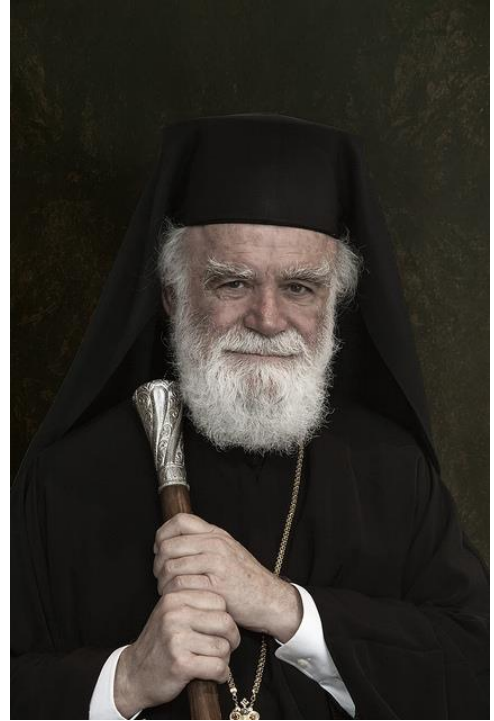


My Beloved Ones,

In this week's Gospel, we see an act of faith so great, that it surprises even our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The miracle, according to St. Matthew, occurs when our Lord enters the small seaside village of Capernaum. A desperate Roman soldier, a centurion, approaches Jesus, asking that the Lord might heal his paralyzed and frightened servant. Jesus of course, has mercy, and says, *"I will come and cure him"* (Matthew 8:7).

However, the Centurion then makes a shocking statement: *"Lord, I am not worthy to have you come under my roof; but only speak the word, and my servant will be healed"* (Matthew 8:8). Remember who it is that says those words to Jesus. This man is not a Jew, or a Samaritan; he is not even a Canaanite, from the same area. He is a pagan Roman, a soldier of the army that occupies the land. It would not be surprising for many of the Disciples to be shocked at the Centurion's humility: how can he say such a thing to a Jew?



The Centurion continues to demonstrate his belief by explaining how Christ can help, even without entering his home: *"For I also am a man under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes, and to another, 'Come,' and he comes, and to my slave, 'Do this,' and the slave does it"* (Matthew 8:9). The Centurion (so called, because he was in command of up to one hundred soldiers) does not lord his position over Christ. He knows that he is powerful, but he acknowledges that Christ is even greater when he says, *"I also am a man under authority..."* He humbles himself before the Creator. Therefore, the Centurion's earthly power will be lifted up by the life-giving words of our Lord.

The Evangelist even records our Lord's *"amazed"* reaction, when Jesus tells the Disciples that, *"Truly I tell you, in no one in Israel have I found such faith"* (Matthew 8:10). He then offers a prophecy of what the Kingdom of God shall look like: *"I tell you, many will come from east and west and will eat with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while the heirs of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. And to the centurion Jesus said, 'Go; let it be done for you according to your faith.' And the servant was healed in that hour"* (Matthew 8:11-13).

My beloved, our Lord demonstrates constantly that we are not saved because we say we are Christians. Like the Centurion, those invited to eat of our Lord's banquet will be only those who approach with sincere faith and belief. Saying that we say we follow Him will not guarantee us a place at table. Only the true humility of the Centurion, kneeling before Christ, will lead us to salvation.

+ALEXIOS
Metropolitan of Atlanta