



My Beloved Ones,

I greet you with love and joy in the Name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, as we prepare to enter the second week of the Triodion.

We are familiar with the Parable of the Prodigal Son and how it represents our relationship to our Heavenly Father. We are all Prodigals, who sin and fall into despair; but our ever-loving & all-merciful Creator waits to welcome us home to the Heavenly Banquet, if we repent. However, I believe we will make a very serious mistake if we do not examine the Unforgiving Elder Brother.

The Elder Son stayed by his father's side, but when he was called to the feast, he became angry. *"Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a*

young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!" (Luke 15:29-30) Clearly for all his obedience to his father, the Elder Brother was just like the Hypocritical Pharisees, who at the beginning of this chapter denounced our Lord, because He spoke and ate with sinners. It is to them that the father's words are said: *Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found" (Luke 15:31-32).* Indeed, the sin of the Elder Brother & the Pharisee is that though they obey the Father, they do so out of pride and judgment.

In his First Epistle to the Corinthians, St. Paul says, *"If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing" (1 Corinthians:1-3).* St. Luke intends for us to receive strength from our Lord's parable of repentance, but as with the Publican and the Pharisee, we must not fall into prideful thinking of judging our brother, as the Elder Son does here.

My beloved, as we continue our preparation for Great Lent, let us be mindful of the importance of granting forgiveness to our brothers and sisters, as our Father does for us. Let us remember that our lives as faithful Orthodox Christians matter more when we practice our faith with justice, mercy, faith, and love.

+ALEXIOS

Metropolitan of Atlanta