



My Beloved Ones,

As we continue through the *Triodion*, we are blessed to offer the first Saturday of the Souls, the memorial for all those who have fallen asleep. We do so, because the third Sunday of this pre-Lenten period is Judgement Sunday, referring to the Parable when our Lord returns, dividing the world into the sheep, on His right, and the goats on His left. The sheep He will welcome into His Father's Kingdom: for they gave Him shelter and greeted Him as a stranger; they offered Him food and drink; they clothed Him, visited Him in prison, and nursed Him to health. To the goats on His left, He will say that they did not do these things. Both the sheep and goats will be astonished: when did they meet the King? And the King shall respond, that if they served the least of their brothers and sisters, or if they saw suffering and passed it by, then they treated Christ the same (*Matthew 25:31-46*).

We honor the souls of our brothers and sisters on this first Saturday of Souls, because we all await the Day of Judgement, including our departed loved ones. Knowing that *"The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective"* the Church has set aside days for us to pray for God's mercy on behalf of our loved ones who have left this life (*James 5:16*). When we think of the Koliva of which we will partake after the Memorial Service, we are reminded of St. Paul's words: *"So it is with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power"* (*1 Cor. 15:42-43*). We are reminded that like this wheat, all of humanity shall be raised up on the Last Day—and that we shall be held accountable for what we did or did not accomplish.

Therefore, even as we remember the souls of those who have fallen asleep, we are called to reflect on our own sinfulness and unworthiness. We should remember that in their lives, the sheep were not perfect, and neither were the goats entirely wicked; the sheep understood that charity, mercy, and forgiveness are acts which calm the passions, while the goats lived for themselves, and never offered spiritual fruits that might have helped them grow. Have we fed and sheltered those who are hungry and without homes? Or have we turned away from those who are sick or in prison? Truly, one day someone will pray for our departed soul; and while these prayers are *"powerful and effective"*, we should not forget that it how we act towards *all* people—not just those we love and those who love us—which will determine whether we shall be numbered among the Sheep of our Heavenly Father's Flock.

+ALEXIOS

Metropolitan of Atlanta