My Beloved Ones,

As we prepare to begin Great Lent, this year, Forgiveness Sunday falls on March 17th, the Feast of my Patron Saint, Alexios the Man of God.

Alexios was born to a pious Christian family in 4th century Rome. As the son of a wealthy senator, Alexios was engaged to a woman. However, Alexios was moved by the Holy Spirit to give up worldly things, and so left for the city of Edessa. After 18 years, he returned to Rome, but so great was his devotion to Christ, that he chose to remain a beggar outside the gate of his family home. His faithful father no longer recognized his son, but he took pity on Alexios, and allowed him to live in a small hut on the property. However, his former servants were not as kind, and they mocked Alexios, who suffered all with Christ-like patience, for another 17 years.

Knowing that he was to be called our Heavenly Father, he wrote a message, which revealed his identity to his mother, father, and wife. On the very day of his falling asleep, the Pope of Rome heard a voice telling him to seek out “The Man of God”.

Despite his family’s wealth and power St. Alexios understood that our material possessions will pass away. We, who must live in the world are not called to renounce everything, but we must remember our Lord’s beautiful warning: “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Matthew 6:19-21). Those things that cannot pass away do not belong to this world, and we must use this Lenten season to examine what we keep in our hearts.

St. Alexios also chose to suffer the humiliation of his own former servants because he knew that “…if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father also will forgive you; but if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses” (Matthew 6:14-15). Just as the Father called upon His eldest son to rejoice, and to forgive his prodigal brother, so too must we forgive our fellow man, if we are to begin Lent with a pure heart and mind. Only then will we be in the proper state of preparedness to undergo the events of our Lord’s Passion, Crucifixion and Resurrection.

Armed with these lessons and praying that St. Alexios the Man of God intercede for us, I wish you all, Καλή δύναμη και Καλή Σαρακοστή! Good strength for a blessed Lent!

+ALEXIOS
Metropolitan of Atlanta