



My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

This first Sunday of Lent is dedicated to the Sunday of Orthodoxy, when, in the 8th century, veneration of the holy icons was restored, following more than a century of persecution. Therefore, the Triumph of Orthodoxy means that we proclaim the truth of our Faith and Holy Tradition, which the Church continues to carefully transmit unchanged.

In the Gospel for the Sunday of Orthodoxy, St. John writes of a meeting between Christ, His disciple Philip, & Philip's friend, Nathanael, from Cana in Galilee. Nathanael knew the Scriptures, and so when Philip told him, "*We have found him of whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph*" (John 1:45). Nathanael knew that the Messiah was to come from David's city, Bethlehem, and so, disbelieving, he asked Philip, "*Can anything good come out of Nazareth?*" Philip said to him, "*Come and see*" (John 1:46).

When Philip brought Nathanael, Jesus greeted Him, "*Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!*" (John 1:47) Nathanael was curious: how could Jesus know Him? Our Lord revealed Himself as the Son of God, when He told Nathanael, "*Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you*" (John 1:48). Nathanael was astonished, saying, "*Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the king of Israel*" (John 1:49). Jesus answered, "*Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man*" (John 1:51).

Whether we have inherited Orthodoxy, or if we have come to it later in life, the Sunday of Orthodoxy shows us how a journey must be taken with an understanding of where we began. Therefore, as we prepare to experience the great events of God's plan for our salvation, we must use the strength of the Triumph of Orthodoxy to make sure that our hearts and minds are indeed pointed in the correct direction. Despite persecutions, controversies, arguments and divisions, if we remember those brave Saints and Martyrs, who stood firm, we will be much better prepared to stand in what is the strengthening of our souls and bodies, through fasting and prayer.

May we celebrate this coming Sunday of Orthodoxy as a reminder that we are blessed to consider ourselves the next generation of Orthodox Christians, carefully preserving and proclaiming that, "*This is the Faith of the Apostles; this is the Faith of the Fathers; this is the Faith of the Orthodox; this is the Faith which has established the universe!*"

+SEVASTIANOS
Metropolitan of Atlanta