



My Beloved Ones,

I greet you with love and joy in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, praying that your families continue to receive the Lord's blessings of health, peace, and prosperity as we continue through the beginning of the New Year 2021!

Many see the New Year as a time to undertake resolutions to improve themselves. Such stereotypical resolutions often include weight loss, growth in our jobs, or home improvement projects. All these resolutions, however, are focused on the material rather than the spirit. I come before you to encourage the growth of our spiritual lives in 2021.

As we study for a test or a job examination, what about studying a single Bible chapter, or even a verse before sleep every night? Though we will certainly have more time to devote to projects around our homes during this time of COVID, what if we made sure to call those our

neighbors, relatives, and friends we have not seen in so many months; or those who are suffering, not only from COVID-19, but cancer or heart disease?

One of the challenges as we approach the second year of the pandemic, is how to remind ourselves that we are still part of communities, and not only entering the Church for Divine Liturgy on Sunday. When things begin to return to normal, it falls to us, both clergy and laity, to restore our "muscles" as members of a parish. We must continue to encourage our young people to attend Sunday School & GOYA activities, whether over video or in person. In offering adult Religious Education Courses and Bible Studies, we should encourage those we have missed, to rejoin us.

Finally, one simple spiritual resolution, is to make time for prayer. Whether we are clergymen or laymen, we must try to remember that to pray only during the Divine Liturgy means that prayer can feel artificial, or a matter of obligation. I strongly believe, however, that if we do our best to focus on our prayer lives at the beginning of this year, God will hear us, especially during the pandemic.

If the pandemic has taught us one thing, it might be that living for our fallen selves, we can only perish. However, with God the loving Father who awaits the return of His prodigal children, so long we continue to seek Him in prayer, serving His faithful, we cannot fail. St. Athanasios of Alexandria says, "Be of good heart, it is but a cloud it will soon pass."

May we give glory to Almighty God for blessing us with the strength to meet the cloudy days of the beginning of 2021, but also the opportunity to see the brightness that will also find us, so long as we are ready.

Καλή Χρονιά!

+ALEXIOS
Metropolitan of Atlanta