



My Beloved Ones,

I wish you a blessed Ecclesiastical New Year! I am so very pleased to have returned to our Holy and God-Protected Metropolis of Atlanta, especially after spending a good deal of time on my spiritual home of Vatopaidi Monastery on Mt. Athos.

Concerning the Holy Mountain, I came across [this beautiful news report from the program 60 Minutes](#). Though it was filmed several years ago, sometimes things which are old, seem new. I strongly recommend all those who have an interest in life on Mount Athos to watch the program, which runs a little less than half an hour.

This idea of finding one's spiritual home also comes to my mind, because next week we will be blessed to celebrate the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross: when St. Helen discovered the True Cross of Christ. Before she gave this life-saving instrument its proper veneration, the True Cross was found in a garbage heap outside the walls of Jerusalem. The miraculous sign of the basil growing around the Cross allowed the Empress to see and

understand what so many could not: that our Lord makes Himself known to us in places and at times we least expect; as long truly as we are truly willing to seek the Kingdom of God with open eyes, ears, and hearts.

You can see examples of this in the monks of the Holy Mountain, who live a style of life that is so foreign to many here in America—but one which has survived for thousands of years because God dwells in the hearts and minds of men when they are able to look past the temporary pleasures of this world, and focus on His Will. These monks have learned how to pray so steadfastly that they recite this simple prayer continuously, even when going about their daily work: “*Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner.*” Of course, this kind of unceasing prayer requires a level of concentration and attentiveness that is increasingly more at odds with the pace of our society, which seems to grow faster and faster by the day.

Truly, not all will receive the call to be monastics; though we should all consider ourselves blessed that four young men from the Metropolis of Atlanta reside at the Monastery of Vatopaidi (along with others from the United States at various monasteries on the Holy Mountain), and that we can all learn from their example.

No matter our calling in life, we too are asked to be like St. Helen: watchful. At our baptism we are granted entry into the sacred Church of Christ, but we are still expected to keep our minds and hearts open. St. Helen *found* the True Cross, just as the monks of Vatopaidi, Simonopetra and others *found* their spiritual homes. My brothers and sisters we, who have been given that most precious gift of free will, are not guaranteed eternal life; we must first be willing to pay close attention, ignoring the worldly cares—which will one day decay. Instead we must be ever watchful for our own small patch of basil.

+ALEXIOS

Metropolitan of Atlanta