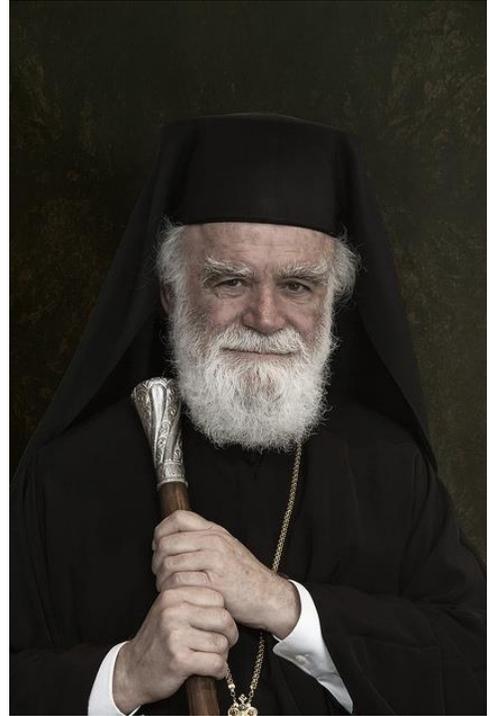


My Beloved Ones,

Have you ever imagined how St. Paul felt after he found Christ? We know that he began as a persecutor of Christians; and that on the road to Damascus, he was blinded by a great light, before giving his life to the service of the Lord. Even so, his life did not become easier. Instead, he suffered from both Roman authorities, and from his fellow Israelites, who now gave him the same kind of treatment he gave St. Stephen.

We cannot be surprised then when he writes in this week's Epistle to the Romans, *"Brothers and sisters, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them [Israel] is that they may be saved."* (Romans 10:1) Having received the light of Christ Resurrected, St. Paul earnestly wishes that his brothers and sisters would also join him in the worship of God's Messiah; but he grieves that they are still unmoved. He knows also that their belief is true, *"...but it is not enlightened."* (Romans 10:2)



St. Paul himself understands how zealousness for the Law can harden hearts. As he says, *"...being ignorant of the righteousness that comes from God, and seeking to establish their own, they have not submitted to God's righteousness."* (Romans 10:3) Mosaic Law was given as a guide to live righteously, but, *"...Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes."* (Romans 10:4) Truly righteous faith, according to St. Paul does not say, *"... 'Who will ascend into heaven?' (that is, to bring Christ down) or 'Who will descend into the abyss?'"* (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead)." (Romans 10:6-7) Christ has already descended into Hades and He has risen from the dead for our sakes'.

Knowing the Truth of salvation, righteous Christian faith requires only that we say: *"... 'The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart'... because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved."* (Romans 10:8-10) In times such as ours, such a message is a beautiful reminder that Christ has already accomplished the impossible—and because He loves us.

Even amid pandemics and unrest, St. Paul proves that all that is required, is to profess our belief in God, and then to demonstrate it to our family and our neighbor. Though the brokenness of our world does not make these tasks easy, it is a comfort to know that we can rest fully in Christ, knowing *"The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?"* (Psalm 27:1)

+ALEXIOS

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