My Beloved Ones,

This Sunday of the Holy Cross gives us much to think about, as we find ourselves halfway through Great Lent. Resting under the shade of the Cross we read in this week’s Epistle that in Christ, “...we have a high priest who has passed through the heavens...” (Hebrews 4:14) Unlike the human high priests, who gave burnt offerings, salvation now comes to all mankind through Christ the High Priest, who gave the greater sacrifice of His own Body and Blood.

St. Paul is aware that the great mysteries of our faith seem against human reason, as he explains that “...we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God” (1 Corinthians 2:3-4). If an instrument of humiliation and death now grants joy and life, what do we owe Christ, the wise and powerful Lamb of God who willingly was laid upon the Cross?

The Gospel reminds us how Christ calls us to imitate Him, telling us that: “If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me” (Mark 8:34). Though this self-denial is the true struggle of a Christian, a modern monastic, Moses the Hagiorite, says that “...before God sent us the cross we carry, He weighed it, [and] examined it carefully with His omniscient love and justice... You think that it is heavier than you can lift, while you have unknown and undiscovered powers within you...”

Instead of asking God to take away our difficulties, praying for patience can help us to carry our Cross. Monk Moses writes that a person can see their pain as an opportunity to learn this Christ-like patience: “[H]e faces the problem very differently; if [pain] does not fill him with joy, it nevertheless fills him with hope. Divine Grace can lead the severely tested to this maturity. We will speak the good word, but the Grace of God will complete this work.” Remember that St. Paul himself tells us “Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:16).

And so, let us remember the words of the Apolytikion of the Sunday of the Holy Cross: “Lord, save Your people and bless Your inheritance, granting our rulers to prevail over adversaries, and protecting Your commonwealth by Your Cross.” I pray that now and forever, we continue to turn to our Lord and His Precious Cross, asking to receive His mercy and grace, so that we can better show our world true Christian patience and love.

+ALEXIOS
Metropolitan of Atlanta