



My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

On this Sunday of the Holy Cross, St. Paul, writes that in Christ, “...we have not a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin...” (Hebrews 4:15) Furthermore, unlike the old mortal high priests, who gave burnt offerings to forgive both their sins, and the sins of the people, Christ the Sinless High Priest offers the greatest sacrifice for the salvation of all mankind: His own precious Body and Blood.

St. Paul reminds us that “...Christ did not exalt himself to be made a high priest, but was appointed by him who said to him... ‘Thou art a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek’” (Hebrews 5:4-5). In the Book of Genesis, “King Melchizedek of Salem was a priest of God Most High. He brought out some bread and wine and said to Abram ‘I bless you in the name of God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth’” (Genesis 14:18-19). In Melchizedek, we have

a type of Christ, appearing thousands of years before His Incarnation: Melchizedek is a King of Salem, or Peace, and like our Prince of Peace, He offers us a sign of the future Eucharist through gifts of bread and wine.

We honor the Holy Cross on this Third Sunday of Lent to remind ourselves that, as our Lord declares in this Sunday’s Gospel reading, “If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me” (Mark 8:34). These last weeks have taught us much about self-denial, not only fasting from food, but also our passions as well. Though we struggle, Jesus tells us what can happen if we abandon this work of transforming our old lives: “For whoever would save his life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. For what does it profit a man, to gain the whole world and forfeit his life? For what can a man give in return for his life?” (Mark 8:35-37) If He who created the universe, would willingly choose to be arrested & abandoned, then mocked & scourged, before being nailed to a cross & pierced with a spear, then we can continue our Fast, which is after all, is only a humble imitation of the sacrificial love He showed us.

All that is required of us is that we “...draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:16). In receiving mercy and grace to rest under the shelter of the Precious and Life-Giving Cross, we shall be prepared to receive His Body and Blood in the Upper Room, to witness Him at Golgotha, and then, to rejoice at His Empty Tomb.

**+SEVASTIANOS
Metropolitan of Atlanta**