

My Beloved Ones,

As we come to the final week of Great Lent, I am thinking often of the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ—an event which offers the purification of our souls and the opportunity of reconciliation with our Creator.

We read in St. Paul's Epistle to the Hebrews, Chapter 9, verses 13-14, that, *"The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean. How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!"*

What a miraculous change; that from the days of the priests and animal sacrifices in the Temple, we now have Jesus Christ, who is both High Priest *and* sacrifice! Even more amazing is to consider that the Passion of our Lord—His Betrayal in Gethsemane, the trials before the Sanhedrin and Pontius Pilate, and His crucifixion on Golgotha—all took place during the festival of Passover, which itself symbolized Moses leading the Israelites away from the tyranny of Pharaoh, across the parted Red Sea, and into the Promised Land of Canaan. Just as the Jewish people are preparing to sacrifice a lamb to commemorate their deliverance from slavery, Jesus Christ is giving Himself as a sacrifice to free us from the tyranny of the Devil.

My brothers and sisters, as our Lord and Savior prepares to complete this new salvific crossing reconciling man to God, these final weeks should also be our own time of preparation. We should use this time to grow in our prayer and fasting, so that we can truly deepen our relationship with Him; so that we may really feel the depth of His sacrificial offering—made for you, me, and for all of Creation.

It is important to remember, that we are not simply commemorating the events of Holy Week as something that happened two thousand years ago. Just as we receive the Body and Blood of our Lord every time we partake of the Eucharist, Christ is being crucified this year—and He will be raised up this year! Just the Eucharist is a sacrament of participation, so too are we meant to be with our Lord as He enters Jerusalem; to stand at the foot of the Cross; and to join the myrrh-bearers very early on the first day of the week...

I pray that you will all be able to enter this mindset during this mystical and holy season; just as I hope that you will pray for me, and for all the clergy of our Metropolis, as they prepare to guide their congregations, one step closer to salvation.

+ALEXIOS

Metropolitan of Atlanta

