

My Beloved Ones,

I greet you with love and joy in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, having returned to our Holy and God-Protected Metropolis of Atlanta.

Next week, we shall celebrate a unique and glorious feast on our Ecclesiastical calendar, the Elevation of the Holy Cross (September 14).

For many Christians, especially those who do not have Holy Tradition in their liturgical lives, the ancient veneration of the Cross of Christ poses a stumbling block: how can an instrument of torture and political oppression be worthy of devotion?

Holy Tradition explains that St. Constantine's blessed mother, the Empress St. Helen, made it her goal to seek out earthly relics of Christ, including the True Cross. By the time she arrived at Golgotha in the year 325, the former execution site was little more than a trash dump. However, amidst the waste, there was a never before seen fragrant plant; that which we now know as Basil, since it belongs to our King. After careful excavation, three crosses were uncovered: one, the True Cross of Christ, separated from the sign which had publicly declared our Lord "the King of the Jews", and the crosses of the two thieves crucified with Him.

In order to determine which of the crosses the True Cross was, a sick woman was brought before all three. She venerated the first and the second, with neither having any effect. But when she kissed the third she was instantly made well. Similarly, when a funeral procession passed by, the dead man was placed atop each of the crosses, and the True Cross of Christ raised him from the dead.

This lesson is not simply to illustrate a literal miracle that occurred over a millennia ago, but to reemphasize that each of us has been granted victory over death on account of the Cross. Through the torture, humiliation and death our Lord suffered, God allowed ourselves to be as close to Him as we were in the beginning. Now, death has no sting, no dominion, and an instrument of torture has become the instrument of our salvation.

Particularly as we approach the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of 9/11 this weekend, and all the difficult memories of despair and sadness that follow, we would do well to remember our Lord's words, for indeed, when he was lifted up, all men were drawn to Him.

+ALEXIOS  
Metropolitan of Atlanta

