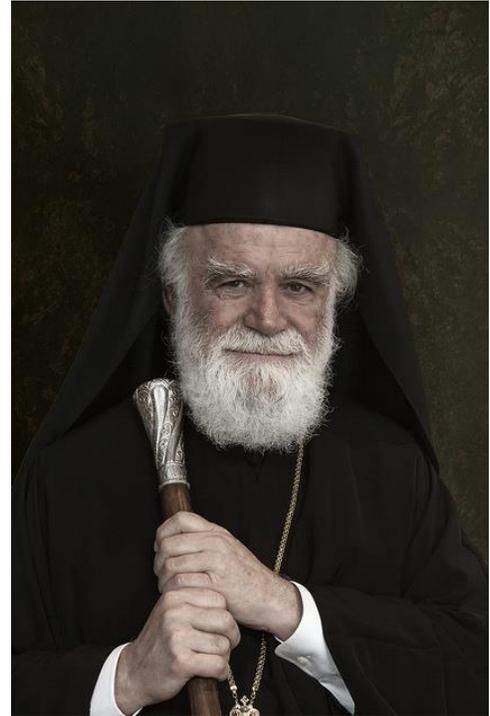


My Beloved Ones,

In this week's Epistle, the Apostle Paul writes to the Romans, explaining how we can receive the Grace of God, and therefore, *"...our hope of sharing the glory of God."* (Romans 5:2). The Apostle continues by showing that we know *"...that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us."* (Romans 5:3-5) This is indeed a beautiful summation of the ways in which those negative things we experience in life should instead be seen as gifts, meant to inspire us to draw closer to our Creator and Savior.



In such a time as this, with pain and turmoil, as well as a pandemic, it is important to remember that Christ does not promise that His followers will receive an easy life. No, instead He says, *"Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."* (Matthew 11:28-30) Therefore, if we continue to seek rest in our Lord, then, as St. Paul says, our suffering will lead us to hope.

St. Paul also demonstrates the true awesomeness of our Lord's love for His Creation, by making a point that *"...rarely will anyone die for a righteous person... But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us."* (Romans 5:7-8) St. Paul knows that, to former pagans, the Crucifixion is a great mystery. They were used to offering sacrifices to appease their Gods, who were believed to be as weak humanity. Instead, however, we have the Person of Christ who even did away with the old Temple sacrifices to the One True God, through His Passion. Therefore, *"...more surely then, now that we have been justified by his blood, will we be saved through him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life."* (Romans 5:9-10)

My beloved, as we continue to live in these days through patience, prayer and the sacramental life of the Orthodox Church, I truly believe that this week's Epistle is meant to demonstrate how fortunate we are as Christians. We are fortunate because we have been reconciled to the love of a heavenly Father, who wants only the best for a Creation that reflects His Glory.

**+ALEXIOS**  
Metropolitan of Atlanta