



My Beloved Ones,

This coming Sunday of the Holy Cross marks the halfway point of Great Lent and it is meant to be a time to strengthen the faithful for the remainder of our journey. This feast gives us much to reflect upon, as we use the midpoint of the Fast for a brief rest in the shade of the True Cross. This Feast reminds us not only of His coming voluntary Passion, but also how He calls us to imitate Him—though, mercy, sacrifice, and love.

St. Paul, in this week's Epistle to the Hebrews, says that in Christ, "*...we have a high priest who has passed through the heavens...*" (Hebrews 4:14) This is a great new understanding of the high priest, who was once just an ordinary man. Furthermore, unlike the high priests of old, who gave burnt offerings on behalf of the people, salvation now comes to all mankind through Christ the High Priest, who His own Body and Blood, the greatest sacrifice. Therefore, some might say that it stands to reason that we owe Christ the High Priest a

great debt for all that he has undertaken for our sakes.

St. Paul is already aware of the great mysteries of our faith, and how these mysteries often act against human reason and understanding, as when he explains to the Corinthians 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 23-24) If the Cross, an instrument of humiliation and death, now grants joy and life, what indeed do we owe Christ, the Lamb of God who willingly was laid upon the Cross?

According to St. Paul, rather than any great debt of guilt, what is required of us is that we confidently, "*...draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*" (Hebrews 4:16). Christ "*...gave Himself up for the life of the world...*" and yet all that He asks us to do in kind is to honor the mercy received from Him by being merciful to others. This is the message of the Sunday of the Holy Cross: that things are not as they appear to human eyes, and human understanding.

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 as we thank Him for His Gifts of His mercy and Grace, by repaying them in kind.

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