



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 from Mount Athos.

This Friday, we are blessed once more to celebrate a unique and glorious feast on our Ecclesiastical calendar, the Elevation of the Holy Cross.

Holy Tradition explains that after St. Constantine legalized Christianity, his blessed mother, the Empress St. Helen, made it her goal, not only to build churches over the pagan temples, but also 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 place of rebels and criminals was now a trash dump.

In all the waste and garbage, many would have felt overwhelmed and discouraged. However, guided by her steadfast faith, St. Helen continued to search, not with her senses, but with her heart. And with her heart, she saw and smelled a plant she did not recognize; the plant which we now know as Basil, because it belongs to our King. After

careful excavation near the basil, three crosses were uncovered: one was the True Cross of Christ (which had been separated from the sign that had declared our Lord “the King of the Jews”) and the others were the crosses of the two thieves who were 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 bringing any change in her illness. 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.

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

Even St. Paul recognized this when he wrote to the church at Corinth, “...*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). Indeed, it is only when we consider that God turned all human logic upside down, that we begin to understand His intentions. Not only did He come to save humanity in the form of poor child, but instead of vanquishing His enemies with a vast army, he chose instead to end death by death.

By the Cross that we shall soon uplift and venerate, Christ demonstrates not only by words, but actions, that “*the Son of Man did not come to be served. But to serve...*” (Mark 10:45) For as He said, what greater love can there be than to lay down one’s life for one’s friends? And truly, through the course of His whole earthly life—even on the Cross we shall venerate—the Son of Man truly showed *philanthropia*, His Love of Humanity.

**+ALEXIOS**  
Metropolitan of Atlanta