



My Beloved Ones,

I write to you today, having embarked on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. Please know that I am always praying for you as we visit the places in which our Lord lived and taught, was crucified and rose again.

It is to this very place that our Church believes the Apostle Paul wrote His *Epistle to the Hebrews*, a letter for a community of early Christians, who perhaps were facing persecution for accepting Jesus as God's promised Messiah,

In order to strengthen them in their faith, Paul repeatedly reminds them that Christ came to fulfill the Law and the Prophets of old. In this week's reading, Paul does so by show the differences between Christ and the Temple High Priest.

Christ, Paul says, is unlike the Priests of old, who were appointed out of understanding that Man is weak. Christ, as Paul says is, "*holy, blameless... exalted above the heavens*" (*Hebrews 7:26*). Remember that in our Orthodox Christian understanding, the Law was given to humankind to prepare our hearts little by little for the coming of God's Son. As St. Paul says, "*...the word of the oath, which came later than the law, appoints a Son who has been made perfect for ever.*" (*Hebrews 7:28*) Once He became Incarnate, we had a living example of the Way in which God expects us to walk.

Christ is like the High Priest, in that He is considered separate, but this is not because He alone was chosen from among the people to make offerings to God. Rather, He is "*separated from sinners...*" because He is the sacrifice. We read, that "*He has no need, like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people; he did this once for all when he offered up himself*" (*Hebrews 7:28*). This is the reason that we as Orthodox Christians have no need to any longer give up whole burnt offerings—the Eucharist alone is a reminder of Christ's perfect sacrifice.

As I continue to reflect on Our Lord's ministry and the perfect sacrifice He undertook for our sakes, I hope that your liturgical experiences are strengthened in the understanding of what Holy Communion means, and our responsibility towards our High Priest who loves us, even to lay down his own life.

+ALEXIOS
Metropolitan of Atlanta