



When, then, you make the sign of the Cross on the forehead, arm yourself with a saintly boldness, and reinstall your soul in its old liberty; for you are not ignorant that the Cross is a prize beyond all price.

Consider what is the price given for your ransom, and you will never more be slave to any man on earth. This reward and ransom is the Cross. You should not then, carelessly make the sign on the forehead, but you should impress it on your heart with the love of a fervent faith. Nothing impure will dare to molest you on seeing the weapon, which overcometh all things.

Saint John Chrysostom

Sunday 23 March 2014 is the Sunday of the Veneration of the Holy Cross

Matins Gospel: Luke 24:36-53

Epistle: Hebrews 4:14-16; 5:1-6

Gospel: Mark 8:34-38; 9:1

Apolytikion:

Lord, save your people and bless your inheritance, granting to faithful Christians victories over their enemies, and protecting your commonwealth by your Cross.

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Readings and saints for this week:

Monday: Isaiah 14:24-32; Genesis 8:21-9:7; Proverbs 11:19-12:6
Forefeast of the Annunciation; Bp. Artemon

Tuesday: Luke 1:39-49, 56; Hebrews 2:11-18; Luke 1:24-38
Annunciation of the Theotokos

Wednesday: Isaiah 26:21-27:9; Genesis 9:18-10:1; Proverbs 12:23-13:9
Synaxis of the Archangel Gabriel; 26 Martyrs in Crimea

Thursday: Isaiah 28:14-22; Genesis 10:32-11:9; Proverbs 13:19-14:6
Matrona of Thessalonica; Paul, Bishop of Corinth

Friday: Isaiah 29:13-23; Genesis 12:1-7; Proverbs 14:15-26
Hilarion the New; Herodion the Apostle of the 70

Saturday: Hebrews 6:9-12; Mark 7:31-37
Hieromartyr Mark of Arethusa; Martyr Cyril the Deacon & Companions



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A Bulletin of Orthodox Christian Faith

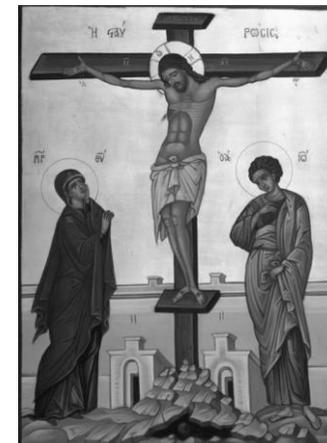
23 March 2014

Take Up Your Cross

Today, on the third Sunday of Great Lent, the Sunday of the veneration of the Holy Cross, we listen to Saint Mark's Gospel and hear Jesus Christ's challenging words about what it means to be His followers. He calls us to renounce ourselves, take up our cross and follow Him, and warns us that if we seek to save our lives we will surely lose them.

These are disturbing words and remind us of the great cost involved in being a Christian. Too often we can domesticate what it means to bear our cross, forgetting that, for Christ, the Cross was something that cost Him His life. And He reminds us in this Gospel that, if we are to be His followers, it will also cost us our life.

We might wonder at this. Is not our life a gift from God, and does He not desire that we should live it to the full? Why should He expect us to renounce life? Does God really want us to be miserable? Jesus gives us a clue to this paradox by telling us that "whoever loses his life for my sake, and for the sake of the Gospel, will save it."



Jesus Christ came to bring us abundant life and to restore to life those who are in the tombs, as we will sing at Pascha. But in order for us to receive this gift of life we need to die to all of our tendencies to sin, to renounce our own selfishness and the many ways it has infiltrated our lives, and to open ourselves to genuinely following Christ. What this involves will be different for each one of us, but we know that there is no true life which does not involve dying to ourselves. And we know too that, in doing so, we receive the only life that is truly worth living.

In Paradise of old the tree stripped me bare; for by giving me its fruit to eat, the enemy brought in death. But now the Tree of the Cross that clothes men with the garment of life has been set up on earth, and the whole world is filled with boundless joy. Beholding it venerated, O ye people, let us with one accord raise in faith our cry to God: His house is full of glory.

From Matins for the Veneration of the Holy Cross

A Mercy of Peace, a Sacrifice of Praise

An introduction to the Divine Liturgy (continued)

We saw last week that the Holy Anaphora – the most sacred part of the Divine Liturgy – is all about thanking God for the great things that He has done for us in making our salvation possible. At the heart of this great act of thanksgiving is the remembrance of the Last Supper which Jesus Christ shared with His Apostles. In the Liturgy, we do not simply remember this Mystical Supper as an event in the past, but we become actual participants in it. There is only one sacrifice of Christ on the Cross and this sacrifice cannot be contained by time or place.

At the heart of this remembrance is the fact that Jesus Christ “gave Himself up for the life of the world.” Recounting what Christ did at the Last Supper, the Liturgy continues:



He took bread in His holy, most pure and unblemished hands and, when He had given thanks and had blessed, sanctified and broken it, give it to His holy Disciples and apostles, saying:

Take, eat; this is my body, which is broken for you, for the forgiveness of sins. ...

Likewise after supper He also took the cup, saying:

Drink from this, all of you; this is my blood of the New Covenant, which is shed for you and for many for forgiveness of sins. ...

Remembering therefore this our Saviour's command and all that has been done for us: the Cross, the Tomb, the Resurrection on the third day, the Ascension into heaven, the Sitting at the right hand, the second and glorious Coming again,

Offering you your own from your own – in all things and for all things –

We are unable to offer God anything that is not already His, but the greatest gift that we can offer Him is that which He has given us Himself, namely the Sacrifice of Jesus Christ Himself. For it is this great gift that is at the heart of our faith. In the words of Saint Nicholas Cabasilas, “A few drops of blood re-create the whole world.”

‘God so loved the world [John 3:16]: notice how much wonderment is contained in this. Reflecting on the magnitude of what he had to convey, John the Evangelist could not but say, so loved ... Tell us, blessed John, how much is that “so loved”? Tell us the measure; tell us the magnitude; teach us of the superabundance. God so love the world that He gave His only-begotten Son. ... Each word has great significance ... and the whole demonstrates the exceeding greatness of the divine love. For the distance separating God and mankind was vast, infinite even. The immortal God who is without beginning, the boundless greatness, loved those who were formed from earth and dust, who were filled with innumerable sins. He loved the ungrateful, those who were constantly contravening His divine will.

Saint John Chrysostom

The Veneration of the Holy Cross

Shine, Cross of the Lord, with the bright darting rays of your grace on the hearts of those who honour you, and with love inspired by God, embrace you, O desire of all the world. Through you our tears of sorrow have been wiped away; we have been delivered from the snares of death and have passed over to unending joy. Show us the splendour of your beauty, granting to us your servants the reward of our abstinence, for we entreat with faith your rich protection and great mercy.

Hail, life-giving Cross! the fair Paradise of the Church, Tree of incorruption that blossoms for us with the enjoyment of eternal glory. Through you the hosts of demons are driven back, the companies of the Angels rejoice with one accord and the congregations of the faithful keep the feast. You are an invincible weapon, an unbroken stronghold; you are the victory of kings and the glory of priests. Grant us also now to draw near to the Passion of Christ and to His Resurrection.

Hail, life-giving Cross! unconquerable trophy of the true faith, door to Paradise, succour of the faithful, rampart set about the Church. Through you the curse has utterly destroyed, the power of death swallowed up, and we are raised from earth to heaven: invincible weapon, adversary of demons, glory of martyrs, true ornament of holy monks, haven of salvation bestowing on the world great mercy.

Come, first-fashioned pair, who fell from the choir on high through the envy of the murderer of humankind, through the bitter pleasure of tasting from the tree. See, the Tree, revered by all, draws near! Run with haste and embrace it joyfully, and cry to it with faith: O all-honoured Cross, you are our succour; partaking of your fruits we have gained incorruption; we are restored once more to Eden, and we have received great mercy.

From Vespers for the Sunday of the Veneration of the Holy Cross

Today, on the third Sunday of Great Lent, we commemorate and adore the Holy and Life-Giving Cross of Christ. In some ways this is similar to the feasts of the Exaltation and Procession of the Cross that we celebrate on 14 September and 1 August. However, this feast is not connected to any historical event, but is rather given to us to mark an important place on our Lenten pilgrimage. It tells us that we are in the middle of Great Lent.

Like the people of Israel we have been wandering in the desert, cast out of Paradise, aware of our alienation from God, but also of our desire to return to Him. If we have been



fasting seriously, we are probably getting to the point where we are beginning to feel it, and we may even be asking ourselves whether it is all worth it.

The Church gives us this feast to encourage us on our pilgrimage to Pascha. It likens the Holy and Life-giving Cross to the spring of Marah which the children of Israel encountered in the wilderness (Ex 15:22-25). Its waters were bitter, but when the Prophet Moses placed a piece of wood in the water they became sweet, prefiguring the Cross of Christ which likewise sweetens our Lenten fast.

This day also marks a shift in focus, from our own repentance and Lenten efforts to the events of Holy Week and Pascha. We are called to turn our attention to Christ and His sacrifice and we also receive strength from the knowledge of His Resurrection that we are journeying towards.