

Let us not then be ashamed to confess the Crucified. Be the Cross our seal made with boldness by our fingers on our brow, and on everything; over the bread we eat, and the cups we drink; in our comings in, and goings out; before our sleep, when we lie down and when we rise up; when we are in the way, and when we are still. Great is that preservative; it is without price, for the sake of the poor; without toil, for the sick; since also its grace is from God. It is the Sign of the faithful, and the dread of devils: for He *'triumphed over them in it, having made a show of them openly'* [Colossians 2:15]; for when they see the Cross they are reminded of the Crucified; they are afraid of Him, who *'bruised the heads of the dragon'*. Despise not the Seal, because of the freeness of the gift; but for this the rather honour your Benefactor.

Saint Cyril of Jerusalem



**Sunday 15 March 2015 is the
Sunday of the Holy Cross**

Matins Gospel: John 20:1-10

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

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

Resurrectional Apolytikion

Thou didst abolish death by Thy Cross; Thou didst open Paradise to the thief; Thou didst transform the myrrh-bearers' lamentation, and didst bid Thine Apostles to preach that Thou art risen, O Christ God, granting great mercy to the world.

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.

Readings and saints for this week:

Monday: Isaiah 14:24-32; Genesis 8:21-9:7; Proverbs 11:19-12:6
Martyr Sabine; Christodoulos the Wonderworker

Tuesday: Isaiah 25:1-9; Genesis 9:8-17; Proverbs 12:8-22
Alexis the Man of God; Patrick, Enlightener of Ireland

Wednesday: Isaiah 26:21-27:9; Genesis 9:18-10:1; Proverbs 12:23-13:9
Cyril, Abp. Of Jerusalem; Trophimos & Eukarpion, Monk-martyrs

Thursday: Isaiah 28:14-22; Genesis 10:32-11:9; Proverbs 13:19-14:6
Martyrs Chrysanthus and Daria; Demetrios the New Martyr

Friday: Isaiah 29:13-23; Genesis 12:1-7; Proverbs 14:15-26
Fathers of the Monastery of St Savas; Cuthbert the Wonderworker

Saturday: Hebrews 6:9-12; Mark 7:31-37
James the Confessor; Thomas, Pat. Of Constantinople



Evangelion

A Bulletin of Orthodox Christian Faith

15 March 2015

Take Up Your Cross

Today, on 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 if we are to receive this gift of life we need to die to our tendency to sin and to renounce our own selfishness and the many ways it has infiltrated our lives. We need to open ourselves to genuinely following Christ. What this involves will be different for each one of us, but there is no true life that 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



The Seal of the Gift of the Holy Spirit

A series on the meaning of Chrismation

We have seen that in the Mystery of Chrismation we are sealed “with the gift of the Holy Spirit,” making us Christ’s own people, consecrating us as members of His holy people, and giving us the gift of His Holy Spirit.

The oil used in this anointing is not just any oil, but is specially prepared Chrism or holy Myron. Saint Cyril of Jerusalem writes:

Take care not to imagine that this Myron is anything ordinary. In the same way as the bread of the Eucharist, after the invocation of the Holy Spirit, is no more ordinary bread, but the Body of Christ, so the holy Myron is no longer ordinary ... after the epiclesis, but the Charism of Christ, made efficacious of the Holy Spirit by the presence of His divinity.



In the very beginning of the Church’s life, the anointing with the Holy Spirit occurred through the laying on of hands by the Apostles. But as the Church spread, the practice developed of the Apostles consecrating oil that was used to impart this gift of the Holy Spirit. Based on a recipe given in the book of Exodus (30:22-25), the sanctification of the holy Chrism has been a solemn act of the Church from the earliest times. Only bishops could sanctify the Chrism and during the course of

history the right to sanctify it was reserved to the Patriarchs of autocephalous Churches, with the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople having particular privileges in this regard.

The holy Myron consists of olive oil that is mixed with precious balsams and perfumes during an elaborate rite that is carried out, when needed, during Holy Week. It is distinguished from other oils used by the Church by its fragrance, reminding us, as Saint Cyril of Jerusalem says, that:

You were anointed on the nostrils so that perceiving the perfume (Myron) of Christ, you can say: “We are the sweet perfume of Christ.”

Like the Holy Body and Blood of Christ, the Holy Myron is kept in the tabernacle on the altar.



On receiving baptism the soul shines brighter than the sun, being purified by the Holy Spirit; and not only do we behold God’s glory, but from it we receive a certain gleam ourselves.

Just as bright silver, when struck by beams of light, can send out beams in its turn, not simply of its own nature but from the sun’s brilliance, so also the soul, once purified and become brighter than silver, receives a beam from the glory of the Holy Spirit and sends that on.

Saint John Chrysostom

The Sunday 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.



O Christ our God, of Thine own will Thou hast accepted Crucifixion, that all mankind might be restored to life. Taking the quill of the Cross, out of love for man in the red ink of royalty with bloody fingers Thou hast signed our absolution. We are in danger once more of being parted from Thee; O forsake us not! Take pity on Thy people in distress, for Thou alone art longsuffering. Rise up and fight against our enemies in Thine almighty power.

From Vespers for the
Veneration of the Holy Cross

‘And He came to the place of a skull.’ Some say that Adam died there, and lies there; and that Jesus in this place where death had reigned, there also set up the trophy. For He went forth bearing the Cross as a trophy over the tyranny of death: and as conquerors do, so He bore upon His shoulders the symbol of victory.

Saint John Chrysostom