

Many indeed are the wondrous happenings of that time: God hanging from a cross, the sun made dark and again flaming out; for it was fitting that creation should mourn with its creator. The temple veil rent, blood and water flowing from his side: the one as from a man, the other as from what was above man; the earth shaken, the rocks shattered because of the rock; the dead risen to bear witness to the final and universal resurrection of the dead. The happenings at the sepulchre and after the sepulchre, who can fittingly recount them? Yet no one of them can be compared to the miracle of my salvation. A few drops of blood renew the whole world, and do for all men what the rennet does for the milk: joining us and binding us together.

Saint Gregory the Theologian



11 September is the Sunday before the Holy Cross

Matins Gospel: Matthew 28:16-20

Epistle: Galatians 6:11-18

Gospel: John 3:13-17

Resurrectional Apolytikion:

Let the Heavens rejoice; let earthly things be glad; for the Lord hath wrought might with His arm, He hath trampled upon death by death. The first-born of the dead hath He become. From the belly of Hades hath He delivered us, and hath granted great mercy to the world.

Seasonal Kontakion:

In your holy birth, Immaculate One, Joachim and Anna were rid of the shame of childlessness; Adam and Eve of the corruption of death. And so your people, free of the guilt of their sins, celebrate crying: "The barren one gives birth to the Theotokos, who nourishes our life."

Readings and saints for this week:

Monday, 12 September: 2 Corinthians 8:7-15; John 11:47-54
Apodosis of Nativity of the Theotokos; Hieromartyr Autonomos

Tuesday, 13 September: Hebrews 3:1-4; John 12:25-36
Forefeast of the Exaltation; Temple of the Resurrection

Wednesday, 14 September: John 12:28-36; 1 Corinthians 1:18-24; John 19:6-11, 13-20, 25-28, 30
Elevation of the Holy Cross; Commemoration of the 6th Ecumenical Council

Thursday, 15 September: Colossians 1:24-29, 2:1; Matthew 10:16-22
Great Martyr Nikitas; Philotheus the Wonderworker

Friday, 16 September: 2 Corinthians 6:1-10; Luke 7:36-50
Great Martyr Euphemia; Sebastiana, Disciple of Paul

Saturday, 17 September: 1 Corinthians 1:26-31; 2:1-5; John 8:21-30
Martyrs Sophia, Pistis, Elpis & Agape; Herakleides & Myron of Crete



Evangelion

A Bulletin of Orthodox Christian Faith

11 September 2016

The Son of Man Must be Lifted Up

Today, on the Sunday before the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, we hear Jesus' words to Nicodemus, who had come to ask Him about salvation. And at the heart of this salvation that Jesus Christ came to bring to our world is the great mystery of the Cross. For it is through His death and apparent defeat on the Cross that He has in fact conquered death and opened the way to life for all who follow Him.

In this passage, Jesus refers to the bronze serpent that God had instructed the prophet Moses to place on a pole when the people of Israel were wandering in the wilderness (Numbers 21: 9). Many of them were suffering from snake bites, but when they looked at this bronze serpent they were healed.

This is one of the Old Testament passages that points to the Cross of Christ. However, as Saint John Chrysostom reminds us, the healing that people found in this serpent was only a very faint anticipation of Christ's victory on the Cross:



...there the hanging serpent healed the bites of serpents, here the Crucified Jesus cured the wounds inflicted by the spiritual dragon; there he who looked with his bodily eyes was healed, here he who beholds with the eyes of his understanding put off all his sins; there that which hung was brass fashioned into the likeness of a serpent, here it was the Lord's Body, built by the Spirit; there a serpent bit and a serpent healed, here death destroyed and a Death saved.

This great victory of Christ on the Cross is central to our faith, yet it is also a great paradox and goes beyond our logical thought, which is why Saint Paul called it "a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles" (1 Corinthians 1: 23). Indeed, the death of Christ on the Cross has become for us the source of life.

Why did Christ stretch himself out on the cross for sinners and why did He give His holy body over to suffering for the sake of the world? I suggest that God did this for only one reason: to make His love known to the world, so that our ability to love, increased by such a discovery, would be the prisoner of His love.

Saint Isaac the Syrian

The Church and Human Rights

The Message of the Holy and Great Council

The Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church was recently held from 19 to 26 June at the Orthodox Academy of Crete. Having discussed the challenges posed by secularization, scientific progress, the destruction of the environment, and globalization, the Council Fathers turn to the topic of politics and human rights:

The Church does not involve herself with politics in the narrow sense of the term. Her witness, however, is essentially political insofar as it expresses concern for man and his spiritual freedom. *The voice of the Church was always distinct and will ever remain a beneficial intervention for the sake of humanity.* The local Orthodox

Churches are today called to promote a new constructive synergy with the secular state and its rule of law within the new framework of international relations, in accordance with the biblical saying: “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s and to God the things that are God’s” (cf. Matt 22.21). This synergy must, however, preserve the specific identity of both Church and state and ensure their earnest cooperation in order to preserve man’s unique dignity and the human rights which flow therefrom, and in order to assure social justice.



Human rights are today at the center of political debate as a response to contemporary social and political crises and upheavals and in order to protect the freedom of the individual. The approach to human rights on the part of the Orthodox Church centers on the danger of individual rights falling into individualism and a culture of “rights”. A perversion of this kind functions at the expense of the social content of freedom and leads to the arbitrary transformation of rights into claims for happiness, as well as the elevation of the precarious identification of freedom with individual license into a “universal value” that undermines the foundations of social values, of the family, of religion, of the nation and threatens fundamental moral values.

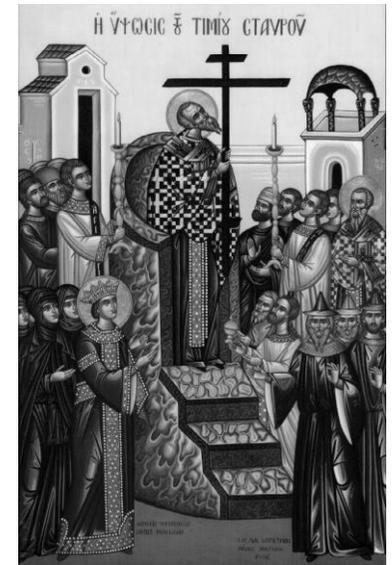
Accordingly, the Orthodox understanding of man is opposed both to the arrogant apotheosis of the individual and his rights, and to the humiliating debasement of the human person within the vast contemporary structures of economy, society, politics and communication. The tradition of Orthodoxy is an inexhaustible source of vital truths for mankind. No one has honored man and cared for him as much as the God-man Christ and his Church. A fundamental human right is the protection of the principle of religious freedom in all its aspects--namely, the freedom of conscience, belief, and religion, including, alone and in community, in private and in public, the right to freedom of worship and practice, the right to manifest one’s religion, as well as the right of religious communities to religious education and to the full function and exercise of their religious duties, without any form of direct or indirect interference by the state. (For more, see www.holycouncil.org)

The Exaltation of the Holy & Life-giving Cross

On Wednesday we celebrate the Great Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross. On this day we commemorate two specific incidents. The first is the finding of the Cross upon which Christ was crucified by the Empress Helena during her travels in Palestine in 326 A.D. On reaching Golgotha she ordered that the pagan temple be destroyed and when this was done three crosses were found on its site. Uncertain which one was the Cross of the Lord, they were placed on a dying woman who was miraculously healed when the True Cross touched her. The second incident commemorates the recovery of the True Cross in 628 A.D. after it had been captured by the Persians.

This feast is a day of fasting and repentance. The Cross is placed in the centre of the Church, and is surrounded by flowers and basil. As we venerate the Cross, we prostrate ourselves before the Lord, pledging Him our loyalty and pleading for His mercy.

The Cross was originally an instrument of torture and death, and it reminds us of the sufferings of Christ and of His great love for us, a love that the world could not understand. However, it is also a sign of His victory over death. Through His death on the Cross, Jesus Christ has conquered death and so Saint Paul tells us that we find our glory in the Cross of Christ.



Lord, save Your people and bless Your inheritance, granting our rulers to prevail over adversaries, and protecting Your commonwealth by Your Cross.

Apolytikion for the Feast

Abba Joseph told Abba Isaac: “Once I was with Abba Poimen and saw him fall into ecstasy. Because I had great boldness with him I made a prostration and said to him, ‘Tell me, where were you?’ He was forced to admit, ‘My thoughts were there at the Cross of the Saviour, where Holy Mary the Mother of God was standing, and so I always wanted to cry like that.’”

From the Sayings of the Desert Fathers