

We have within us deeply rooted weaknesses, passions, and defects. They cannot all be cut out with one sharp motion, but patience, persistence, care and attention. The path leading to perfection is long. Pray to God so that he will strengthen you. Patiently accept your falls and, having stood up, immediately run to God, not remaining in that place where you have fallen. Do not despair if you keep falling into your old sins. Many of them are strong because they have received the force of habit. Only with the passage of time and with fervour will they be conquered. Don't let anything deprive you of hope.

Saint Nectarios of Aegina



**18 September is the
Sunday after the Holy Cross**

Matins Gospel: Mark 16:1-8

Epistle: Galatians 2:16-20

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

Resurrectional Apolytikion:

Having learned the joyful proclamation of the Resurrection from the Angel, and having cast off the ancestral condemnation, the women disciples of the Lord spake to the Apostles exultantly: Death is despoiled and Christ God is risen, granting great mercy to the world.

Seasonal Kontakion:

Lifted up on the Cross by Your free will, Christ God, grant mercies to the new commonwealth that bears Your name. Gladden our faithful rulers by Your power, giving them victories over their adversaries. May Your alliance be for them a weapon for peace, an invincible standard.

Readings and saints for this week:

Monday, 19 September: 2 Corinthians 12:10-19; Luke 3:19-22
Martyrs Trophimus, Sabbatius, & Dorymedon; Afterfeast of the Holy Cross

Tuesday, 20 September: Ephesians 6:10-17; Luke 21:12-19
Martyr Eustathius & Companions; Eustathius of Thessalonica

Wednesday, 21 September: 2 Corinthians 13:3-13; Luke 4:1-15
Apodosis of the Holy Cross; Apostle Quadratus

Thursday, 22 September: Galatians 1:1-3, 20-24; 2:1-5; Luke 4:16-22
Hieromartyr Phocas; Phocas the Cyprian

Friday, 23 September: Galatians 4:22-27; Luke 1:5-25
Conception of the Forerunner; Xanthippe & Polyxene the Righteous

Saturday, 24 September: Luke 1:39-49, 56; 2 Timothy 3:10-15; Luke 5:12-16
Protomartyr Thekla; Theotokos Myrtidiotissis



Evangelion

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Whoever Loses their Life will Save it

Today, on the Sunday after the feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, we hear Jesus' challenging words about cross in our own lives. By His victory over death on the Cross, Jesus Christ has conquered death and has opened up for us the possibility of new life. He has provided us with a way that we can follow in order to encounter the new life that He offers us.

However, if we are to enter into this new life and make it our own, then we will also encounter suffering and death in one way or another. Sometimes this will be the apparent suffering that results from letting go of those things in our lives that are not in keeping with God's will for us. Sometimes it will mean sacrificing a lesser good in order to attain a greater good. But sometimes it will also mean the suffering that we experience as a result of our own brokenness and the brokenness of our world.

The victory of Jesus Christ on the Cross does not remove suffering from our lives or suddenly make everything miraculously better. Rather, He provides us with an example of how to face suffering so that it becomes life-giving and does not destroy or embitter us. And He assures us that He is with us in our deepest need, for He Himself knows what it is to be abandoned, rejected, and apparently defeated.

To turn to Christ in prayer is to be honest about the reality of our own lives. But it is also to find Him there, in the middle of our suffering and pain. When we call out "Lord, have mercy, *Kyrie eleison*," we are inviting Jesus Christ into our pain and the pain of the world. If we are really honest, the suffering of our lives is too much for us. But, if we ask Him, He will come to us in our need, and He will help us to carry it.



A man of discernment, meditating on the healing Divine Providence, bears with thanksgiving the misfortunes that come to him. He sees their causes in his own sins, and not in anyone else. But a mindless man, when he sins and receives the punishment for it, considers the cause of his misfortune to be God, or people, not understanding God's care for him.

Saint Maximus the Confessor

Violence in the Name of God

The Message of the Holy and Great Council

The Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church was held from 19 to 26 June at the Orthodox Academy of Crete. Having discussed other challenges posed by our contemporary world, the Council Fathers turn to the topic of religious fundamentalism:

We are experiencing today an increase of violence in the name of God. The explosions of fundamentalism within religious communities threaten to create the view that fundamentalism belongs to the essence of the phenomenon of religion. The truth, however, is that *fundamentalism*, as “zeal not based on knowledge” (Rom 10.2), *constitutes an expression of morbid religiosity*. A true Christian, following the example of the crucified Lord, sacrifices himself and does not sacrifice others, and for



this reason is the most stringent critic of fundamentalism of whatever provenance. Honest interfaith dialogue contributes to the development of mutual trust and to the promotion of peace and reconciliation. The Church strives to make “the peace from on high” more tangibly felt on earth. True peace is not achieved by force of arms, but only through love that “does not seek its own” (1 Cor 13.5). The oil of faith must be used to soothe and heal the wounds of others, not to rekindle new fires of hatred.

The Orthodox Church follows with much pain and prayer and takes note of the *great contemporary humanitarian crisis*: the proliferation of violence and military conflicts; the persecution, exile and murder of members of religious minorities; the violent displacement of families from their homelands; the tragedy of human trafficking; the violation of the dignity and fundamental rights of individuals and peoples, and forced conversions. She condemns unconditionally the abductions, tortures, and abhorrent executions. She denounces the destruction of places of worship, religious symbols and cultural monuments.

The Orthodox Church is particularly concerned about the situation facing Christians, and other persecuted ethnic and religious minorities in the Middle East. In particular, she addresses an appeal to governments in that region to protect the Christian populations – Orthodox, Ancient Eastern and other Christians – who have survived in the cradle of Christianity. The indigenous Christian and other populations enjoy the inalienable right to remain in their countries as citizens with equal rights.

We therefore urge all parties involved, irrespective of religious convictions, to work for reconciliation and respect for human rights, first of all through the protection of the divine gift of life. The war and bloodshed must be brought to an end and justice must prevail so that peace can be restored and so that it becomes possible for those who have been exiled to return to their ancestral lands. We pray for peace and justice in the suffering countries of Africa and in the troubled country of Ukraine. We reiterate most emphatically in conciliar unity our appeal to those responsible to free the two bishops who have been abducted in Syria, Paul Yazigi and John Ibrahim. We pray also for the release of all our brothers and sisters being held hostage or in captivity.

(www.holocouncil.org)

When the Lord tells us in the Gospel that anyone who wants to be His follower must renounce himself, the injunction seems harsh; we think He is imposing a burden on us. But an order is no burden when it is given by one who helps in carrying it out. To what place are we to follow Christ if not where He has already gone? We know that He has risen and ascended into heaven; there, then, we must follow Him. There is no cause for despair – by ourselves we can do nothing, but we have Christ’s promise...

One who claims to abide in Christ ought to walk as He walked. Would you follow Christ? Then walk as He walked. Would you follow Christ? Then be humble as He was humble. Do not scorn His lowliness if you want to reach His exaltation. Human sin made the road rough. Christ’s resurrection levelled it. By passing over it Himself, He transformed the narrowest of tracks into a royal highway. Two feet are needed to run along this highway; they are humility and charity. Everyone wants to get to the top – well, the first step to take is humility. Why take strides that are too big for you – do you want to fall instead of going up? Begin with the first step, humility, and you will already be climbing.

Saint Caesarius of Arles

Saint Silouan the Athonite

On Saturday the Church commemorates Saint Silouan of Mount Athos, a recent saint who speaks to the condition of our contemporary world. He was born to Russian peasant parents and after a pious childhood lost his religious fervor. After almost killing someone in a fight he came to his senses, repented, and decided to become a monk on Mount Athos.

Early in his monastic life Saint Silouan was given the gift of unceasing prayer. However, he nevertheless had to undergo many struggles as the demons attacked his ardent life of prayer with disturbing thoughts. During one of these struggles, the Lord revealed to him that “the proud always suffer from devils.” When he asked what he should do in order to become humble, the Lord replied: “Keep your mind in hell, and do not despair.” He learnt that all ascetic striving must be directed to acquiring the humility of Christ who said: “Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart.” (Matthew 11: 29)

The fruit of this discovery of humility was compassion and prayer for the whole world and he taught that the ultimate criterion for truth is love of one’s enemies. He said:

The soul cannot know peace unless she prays for her enemies. The soul that has learned of God’s grace to pray, feels love and compassion for every created thing, and in particular for mankind, for whom the Lord suffered on the Cross, and His soul was heavy for every one of us.

The Lord taught me to love my enemies. Without the grace of God we cannot love our enemies. Only the Holy Spirit teaches love, and then even devils arouse our pity because they have fallen from good, and lost humility in God.

