

THE UNIVERSAL EXALTATION OF THE
PRECIOUS AND LIFE-GIVING CROSS

Fire & Light

St. Symeon Orthodox Church

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✠ **September 15, 2013** ✠

Postfeast of the Elevation of the Precious and Life-Giving Cross

Great-Martyr Nicetas the Goth (372)

St. Symeon, Archbishop of Thessalonica (1430)

⇒ **Inquirer's Class – Tuesday, September 17, 6:30pm**

⇒ **Annual Parish Meeting Today**

The New Church School year begins today!

⇒ *Please keep up with your Building Fund Pledges!*

Mere learning does not produce a state of spiritual knowledge. . . The human intellect lacks the power to ascend and to participate in divine illumination unless God Himself draws it up.

~ St Maximus
the Confessor

For He went forth bearing the Cross as a trophy over the tyranny of death: and as conquerors do, so He bare upon His shoulders the symbol of victory....

- St. John Chrysostom

REFLECTION – On the Power of the Sign of the Cross

Mysterious is the power of the Cross no matter how unexplainable, it is true and indisputable. Yet, St. John Chrysostom speaks of the custom of his time that the sign of the cross is attached "on the emperor's diadem, on the accouterments of the soldiers and tracing it on parts of the body: the head, the breast [chest] and the heart and also on the table of oblations and over beds." "If it is necessary to expel demons", says he, "we use the cross and it also helps to heal the sick." "St. Benedict made the sign of the cross over a glass which contained poison and the glass burst as though it were struck by a stone. St. Julian made the sign of the cross over a glass of poison brought to him and drank the poison, but he did not feel any pain in his body. The Holy Female Martyr Basilissa of Nicomedia enveloped herself with the sign of the cross, stood amidst the flames and remained unharmed. The Holy Martyrs Audon and Senis crossed themselves when the wild beasts were released on them and the beasts became docile and meek as lambs. Among the ascetics of old, as it is today, the sign of the cross was the most powerful weapon against the temptations of the demons. The most horrible fears of the devil vanish into nothing, as smoke, when man traces the sign of the cross over himself. Thus, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself willed to the one time sign of crime and shame, the Cross, following His crucifixion on the wood of the cross, all victorious power and might.

~ St. Nikolai, from the Prologue of Ochrid

If Anyone Loves Jesus

✠ But that God's word may be made clearer, listen to this. If any one loves Jesus, and attends to Him in earnest, and not in a casual way, but in love abides by Him, God is already devising to make some return to that soul for its love, although the man does not know what he is to receive or what portion God is about to give to the soul.

-St. Macarios the Great (4th C)

Rightly Glorified

✠ Thus the Word of God took up His dwelling in the Theotokos in an inexpressable manner and proceeded from her, bearing flesh ... This is the praise which transcends nature and the surpassingly glorious glory of the Ever-Virgin ... she was also rightly glorified and exalted together with Him ...

-St. Gregory Palamas (14th C)

Carrying the Cross

"If anyone wishes to be a follower of Mine," said the Lord Christ, "he must leave self behind; day after day he must take up his cross, and come with Me" (Lk. 9:23 NEB). Most of us are, I believe, ready enough (in theory) to do so. But I do not think that we are always clear what taking up the cross involves.

The difficulty lies therein, that we cannot choose our cross, we cannot say this I will bear and this is too much to ask of me. We have to accept our cross when and where it is given us, under whatever guise "day by day" and we must reach the point when we do so gladly.

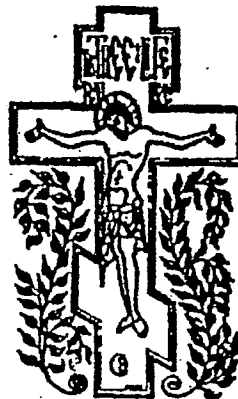
It is hard not to complain. It is harder still not to let people know how heroic we are in the way in which we endure our trials. It takes real force of will not to complain or even mention our trials. Yet this is the crucial point, the difference between Christian fortitude and ordinary endurance. Trials come to all people, believers and nonbelievers. It is the way they react that singles one out from the others. It is the humble, uncomplaining and cheerful acceptance that marks the true follower of Jesus. A Christian does not shy away from suffering, . . . and is glad for what he has endured. Such is the man who truly has taken up his cross and carries it day by day. In the end he will find what he least expected: great joy, for he will meet Christ Himself saying: "Come to Me, all who labor and are heavy laden...For My yoke is easy and My burden is light" (Mt. 11:30).

It is a Christian's duty is to "take up his cross." The word Cross means sufferings, sorrows and adversities. To take up one's cross means to bear without grumblings everything unpleasant, painful, sad, difficult and oppressive that may happen to us in life, without expecting any earthly reward in return, but bear it all with love, with joy and with courageous strength.

-St. Innocent of Alaska

--by Ileana, Princess of Romania
(Mother Alexandra)
November 28, 1961

† † †



THE FEAST OF THE UNIVERSAL EXALTATION OF THE PRECIOUS AND LIFE-GIVING CROSS

Saint Constantine the Great (21 May) was preparing to march on Rome to confront his rival Maxentius when the sign of the Life-giving Cross appeared to him in the midday sky, surrounded with the inscription: *By this sign you shall conquer*. He therefore had his standards adorned with the Sign of the Cross and won a brilliant victory, that enabled him to assume power over the entire Roman world and to assure the triumph of Christianity.

In the twentieth year of his reign (326), Constantine sent his mother Saint Helen to Jerusalem to venerate the Holy Places and find the site of the Holy Sepulcher and of the Cross, that was covered by rubble from building-works, done at the time of Hadrian when the city had been enlarged. Relying upon the oral tradition of the faithful, Saint Helen found the precious Trophy along with the crosses on which the two thieves had hung, and the three nails that had nailed the life-giving body of the Savior, but she could see no way of telling which was the Cross of Christ.

The healing of a dying woman at the touch of the holy Wood Macarius, the Patriarch of Jerusalem, to identify the Cross of Christ, for no miracle was worked by the other two crosses. Then the Queen and her whole court worshipped the Holy Cross and kissed it with great devotion. The people, who had gathered in large numbers at the place, also wanted to share in this grace, or at least – so ardent was their love for Christ – to see from afar the instrument of our Redemption. So the Patriarch mounted the ambo, and taking the Cross in both hands, raised it on high so that all could see it, while the crowd exclaimed: *Kyrie eleison!* This was the occasion of the institution in all the Churches of the Exaltation of the Precious Cross, not only in memory of the event but also to show forth this instrument of shame as having become our pride and our joy. By recalling the action of the Patriarch and by elevating the Cross at the four points of the compass to the chant of *Kyrie eleison*, Christians show today that, in mounting the Cross, Christ desired to reconcile all things to Himself, uniting Creation in all its height and depth and to its farthest bounds in His body, so that we may have access through Him to the Father.

Honor due the Holy Cross

✠ Great honor is due the Holy Cross for upon it, as if upon an altar, Christ in His love for man has burned up our sins. The Cross has exposed our shame and disgrace, not the Lord's. In truth, the Holy Cross proclaims Christ's unfathomable love for mankind. Hence our thoughts about the Cross should, in part, cause us to be ashamed and ought to inspire in us repentance for our sins. It is for us to take up our cross as the Lord took up His for us and our salvation. Of course, an object that brings about the death of an important person evokes in us sadness and pain and we don't treasure it. That does not happen, however, with the Cross of Christ. On the contrary, it brings forth joyfulness and regeneration. For it was not, as some say, a place of execution, but rather a place of sacrifice wherein was offered the greatest and most honorable sacrifice of the ages -- the Son of Man for our salvation. - Elder Cleopa Ilie of Romania (+1998)



AS IT IS WRITTEN . . .

by PATRICK HENRY REARDON

From the Cross

WHEN WE SPEAK OF *excruciating* pain, we do well to look at the etymology of that adjective: *ex cruce*, “out of the cross.” It is nearly impossible to exaggerate what the Savior suffered on the cross.

Whether the cause of Jesus’ death was asphyxiation, or hypercarbia, or hypovolemic shock, or heart failure, or exsanguination, or total physical exhaustion brought on by tetanic contractions throughout his entire body—or any combination of these, or any other plausible suggestion—the astounding fact is that Jesus, at the very end, “cried out again with a loud voice.” From a medical perspective, this is surprising.

Surely, it was the last thing anyone on Calvary could have expected. This “loud voice” demonstrated, nonetheless, the truth of the Savior’s claim: “I lay down my life that I may take it again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again” (John 10:17–18).

Jesus did not simply die. He willingly *tasted death*, according to the Epistle to the Hebrews. He deliberately went through the actual experience of dying. The Gospels indicate that Jesus was conscious and self-aware to the end. There was no disorientation, no coma, no mental befuddlement. The Gospels testify, in fact, that he declined a narcotic that would have disguised and muted his pain. Jesus knew what he was doing.

FOR EVERY ONE

He knew, moreover, *why* he was doing it. It is remarkable that his disciples—then and now—express the conviction that Jesus, in the act of dying, thought of them and poured out his life for each of them. This is the testimony of the Epistle to the Hebrews: “But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that he, by the grace of God, might *taste death* for every person” (Hebrews 2:9, emphasis added).

Hebrews says, “for every person” (*hyper pantas*), not “for all persons” (*hyper panton*). Although Jesus certainly died “for everyone,” it is important to remark that he died “for every one.” In the mind and intent of Jesus, the beneficiaries of his death were not an amorphous group.

The Good Shepherd, who gives his life for the sheep, “calls his own sheep *by name* and leads them out” (John 10:3, emphasis added).

More than two decades after the event, someone who had not known Jesus on earth was so confident on this point that he declared, “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives *in me*; and my life in the flesh I live now by faith of God’s Son, who *loved me* and gave himself *for me*” (Galatians 2:20, emphasis added).

Such has been the conviction of believers down through the ages, those millions in the flesh, who have declared, unto their dying breath, “He loved me. He gave himself for me.”

JOHN’S TESTIMONY

The description of the Savior’s death in the Gospel of John shows every sign of conveying the testimony of an eyewitness. Indeed, the Sacred Text itself calls attention to the firsthand reliability of this testimony: “And he who has seen has testified, and his testimony is true; and he knows that he is telling the truth, so that you may believe” (John 19:35). John alone includes the gentle detail, “And bowing his head . . .” (19:30).

Two further details in John’s testimony seem worthy of special examination.

First, John affirms that Jesus “handed over the Spirit”—*paredoken to Pnevma*. That is to say, the very breath, *pnevma*, with which Jesus expired on the cross becomes for John the symbol and transmission of the Holy Spirit that he confers on the Church gathered beneath his cross.

Second, John records another detail of the scene not mentioned by the other evangelists: “But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out” (19:34).

All together, then, John speaks of three things issuing forth from the immolated body of the Savior: the Spirit, the water, and the blood. These three components—the Spirit, the water, and the blood—appear also in the cover letter for John’s Gospel as the “three witnesses” of the Christian mystery: “And there are three that testify: the Spirit and the water and the blood; and these three are one” (1 John 5:8). These things have to do with the gathering of the Church at the foot of the cross. ◆

The Jesus Prayer

A Talk by Bishop Basil Rodzianko (+ September 17, 1999 – He is written about in the book, *Everyday Saints*, and was a visitor to St. Symeon's in 1988.)

November 15, 1987, Colesville Presbyterian Church, Silver Spring, Md

The Jesus Prayer is as old as the Church is. The very first version of this prayer is recorded in the Gospel when the blind men cried, "Jesus, Son of God, have mercy upon us," and when St. Paul spoke about unceasing prayer. The book *The Way of the Pilgrim* was mainly dedicated to the Jesus Prayer. Now, how can one be engaged in unceasing prayer? This question is precisely the question which that pilgrim asks in the very beginning of the book. How can we pray constantly when we must work and do this and that? How can we pray all of the time?

Someone gave this pilgrim a book called *Dobrotolubiye* in Russian, *The Philokalia* in Greek, which means literally translated "love of goodness", that is the love of the good which is given to us by God, if we are constantly with Him.

In that book one finds the teachings of the Fathers for centuries, long before the conversion of Russia, on how to have this habit of the constant feeling and presence of God. That is the technique of Jesus Prayer. This prayer briefly is, "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me a sinner." And you repeat it all the time. At first to become accustomed to it you start by repeating it aloud several times in the morning or evenings when you pray. Then eventually you become able not to say it out loud but just to repeat it in your thoughts everywhere and in any position. You can pray the Jesus Prayer mentally while doing anything if it is possible from the point of view of attention.

Then, you link it with your breathing. As you say, "Lord Jesus Christ," you breathe in, and when you say, "have mercy on me a sinner," you breathe out. From the purely physiological perspective of the cleansing of our bodies the breath brings in life giving oxygen and releases exhaust or carbon dioxide. But the Prayer is also cleansing one's souls and spirit, bringing in the Grace of God, the mercy of God and Jesus Himself, breathing out sins or anything that is wrong or demonic. Eventually it becomes a habit. You are not saying anything even in the silence of your mind but as you breathe in and out it all becomes linked with this idea of prayer through breathing.

I know for instance that people say, "What shall I do, I just cannot pray, I have no time." And the Staretz or Elders, literally Presbyters, would answer, "Well, pray by breathing. Just make yourself aware of God's presence to such an extent that God enters into you with your breathing in and everything against God goes out with your breathing out." This practice then becomes constant prayer even in your sleep.

Of course, not everyone can attain the high degrees of that prayer but there are people who have been known throughout history whose attainment was wonderful. The result of the Jesus Prayer is that you become a different person, totally different. You become changed and really newly born, not just as an instant decision which may or may not work in the future. Sometimes people who are newly born fall down like Lucifer himself, so that it is a dangerous thing to rely only on that instant decision. But in that building up of prayer within yourself over time, producing it as part of your life, you will find a more constant, and more secure, and more peaceful way. And that prayer will bring you to a new nature.

St. Seraphim of Sarov, one of the Russian Saints of the early nineteenth century, was asked, "What is the aim of Christian life?" And he replied, "The aim of Christian life is to attain the Holy Spirit." It is not

just to do good deeds. Of course, all that is necessary because that is the method to attain but the attainment is something different. To have the Holy Spirit constantly with you and in you, that is the goal. If you have the Holy Spirit with you then you will be already a genuine Christian. Your spirit is linked to the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit is in you. In a sense St. Seraphim was a real charismatic, if you like.

The practice of the Jesus Prayer is a tradition that goes back many centuries on the Holy Mountain of Athos. The method of prayer was called *hesychia*. The Hesychasts were people who were devoting their lives to God. As monks, it was easier for them when they were able, to be silent. In Greek Hesychia means silence or quietness, inner peace, and serenity. In that state of inner silence or serenity these monks were constantly practicing the Jesus Prayer which eventually developed into the attainment of the Holy Spirit.

They were speaking about the Holy Spirit coming just as He came on Mount Tabor at the Transfiguration of Christ when the disciples suddenly were overshadowed by the cloud of Light: according to the symbolic language of the Scriptures, the Grace of the Holy Spirit. Peter then felt that goodness and said these words, "How good it is here. Let us make three tents, one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." Well, that kind of attainment of the Holy Spirit, that Light of Tabor, the monks claim they saw in themselves, and they were in it and with it. And on that experience of the Holy Spirit the teaching was developed theologically.

The very deep theological teaching on the energies of God was developed by a famous theologian and Hesychast named Gregory Palamas who was one of those monks and who eventually became bishop of Thessalonica. In books on Gregory Palamas or in one of his own books you will find the teaching on the genuine and wonderful fruit of the Jesus Prayer in action.

Ed. note: The mental Jesus Prayer varies from a simple recitation, in moments of perplexity or danger; to a system which affects even the body through the breath and heartbeat.

It was at Mount Sinai, in the leading community of early eastern monasticism, that the elaborate Jesus Prayer evolved. By the seventh century the practice had become a tradition among the Sinaitic contemplatives. Mount Athos, which matured to leadership in the eight century, incorporated the tradition of Sinai within its own, and in the fifteen century passed it on to Russia.

How Is God the Judge of Men? ~ Christos Yannaras, theologian

God is not the "judge" of men in the sense of a magistrate who passes sentence and imposes a punishment, testifying to the transgression. He is judge because of what He *is*: the possibility of life and true existence. When man voluntarily cuts himself off from this possibility of existence, he is automatically "judged". It is not God's sentence but His existence that judges him. God is nothing but an ontological fact of love and an outpouring of love: a fullness of good, an ecstasy of loving goodness ...Man is judged according to the measure of the life and existence from which he excludes himself. Sin is a self-inflicted condemnation and punishment which man freely chooses when he refuses to *be* as a personal hypostasis of communion with God and prefers to "alter" and disorder his existence, fragmenting his nature into individual entities - when he prefers corruption and death ...For the Church, sin is not a legal but an existential fact. It is not simply a transgression, but an active refusal on man's part to be what he truly is: the image and "glory", or manifestation, of God.

**Keep in mind God's precept that states, 'Judge not, and you will not be judged' (Luke 6:37),
and in no way meddle in the lives of others.**

~ St. Symeon the New Theologian (1022 -The Discourses)

This and That

Repentance and the Apostle Paul

How could a young man complicit in the lynching of Protomartyr Stephen, and who thereafter went about devastating the churches of Judea and lower Syria with warrants to arrest and imprison Christians, find himself chosen and ordained as Apostle to the Gentiles? How have others guilty of heinous crimes been converted and admitted to ordained services as deacons, priests and bishops over the centuries? (Only by the truth and power of Christ and the Gospel.)

Of course, economics is outside the gospel; of course economics does not bring salvation but that is true of all forms of economics. Greed, lust of power and selfishness poison all economies. No form of economics will cure that spiritual problem by force or any other way. Michael Baumann

"Socialism, said Winston Churchill, is the philosophy of envy and gospel of greed."

...The rush to approve same-sex marriage was really about self-identified "heterosexuals" seeking approval for themselves. Legally sanctioned "gay marriage" is a kind of public proclamation that the constraints of traditional morality do not apply. Aaron Wolf, Chronicles

From its beginnings in the late 19th century Progressivism never advocated power for the people, but power for the self-proclaimed experts, who think that they know better than we do what is in our best interests. Fr. John W. Morris

I think that a topic that will generate a lot of doctoral dissertations in the future will be how a small number of at most 5% of the population has been able to gain such power over our culture. I mean homosexuals. It was not that long ago when anyone advocating same sex marriage would have been considered a kook. Now, the movement for same sex marriages has swept the nation, including most of the old mainline Protestant denominations. This has been one of the swiftest and most radical cultural shifts in history. Fr. John Morris

"They that can give up essential liberty to purchase a little temporary safety, deserve neither liberty nor safety." Ben Franklin

In "The Lessons of History," Will and Ariel Durant wrote: "Leave men free and their natural inequalities will multiply almost geometrically, as in England and America in the nineteenth century under laissez-faire. To check the growth of inequality, liberty must be sacrificed, as in Russia after 1917. Freedom and equality are sworn and everlasting enemies, and when one prevails the other dies."

I disagree that Orthodoxy has an undeveloped moral philosophy. We have a very strong idea of what is right and wrong especially in sexual matters. Sex belongs in marriage between one man and one woman. We do not involve ourselves in secular political activity because we take Christ command to render to Caesar that which is Caesar's rather seriously. Unfortunately, in contemporary American politics involves issues that used to be treated as moral matters beyond the authority of the state have now become politicized, especially under Obama. Until the Democrats embraced abortion rights and now same sex marriage, American politicians steered clear of purely moral issues. Now that is not the case. There was a time not that long ago when there was a moral consensus in our society. That did not mean that people did not commit sexual sins, but at least there was the concept that they were sins. That is no longer the case. The Playboy philosophy of hedonism along with the victory of radical feminism which led to the victory of gay liberation has destroyed that old moral consensus. Archpriest John W. Morris, *Commentary on a critique of Orthodoxy by a Protestant*

Elder Paisios – On Family Life and Care for the Elderly

"Many couples are angered by the difficulties their families face, which are caused by the idiosyncrasies and grumbling of the elderly parents they must tend. They forgot how naughty, grumpy and peculiar they were when they were children. They don't remember that they never gave their parents a moment's rest, with all their crying and affected airs. This is why God allows them to encounter these difficulties: so that they may somehow pay off their bad behavior. Now it is their turn to support and take care of their elderly parents with gratitude, for all the sacrifices they made for them when they were children. Those who don't feel this sense of obligation towards their parents will be judged by God as unjust and ungrateful."

"What has the world come to!? In Pharsa and in Epeirus, people would even take care of elderly animals. ... For example, they 'respected' the strong oxen with which they plowed the fields, so they took care of them in their old age, saying: 'We had bread because of them.' In other words, working animals were taken care of when they grew old and were no longer able to work; they even had a good old age. ... Modern-day man has strayed from such things; they won't even take care of elderly humans, much less animals!"

"I also see that the troubles many worldly people have are often caused by the fact that their parents are embittered with them. Families suffer because they fail to take care of their elderly parents. When the poor little old grandmother, or aged grandfather, is taken to - and abandoned in - a nursing home, with property taken away from them, while unable to enjoy their grandchildren and left to die in bitterness, what kind of blessing can the children ever expect from them?"

"Just today, a lady told me that she has four sons who are married and live on the same block she lives on; but that she can't visit them, because she once told her daughter-in-law: 'Have love among yourselves; go to church with your families!' Well, they were very offended. 'Don't ever come to our homes again!' they declared. She hasn't seen her children for five years, and the poor thing was crying. 'Pray for me, Father,' she told me. 'I have grandchildren too; at least let me see them in my dreams.' Well, what kind of progress can her children expect to make?"

"And even though a grandmother in a family is a great blessing, these people don't understand that. Usually, the grandfather becomes ill sooner and his wife takes care of him. When their father dies, then, it is good for the children to take their mother to their home and have her help with the grandchildren, so that she doesn't feel useless and alone. They both win, as she finds comfort and the parents are greatly helped. For nowadays, a mother never has enough time to do her chores and to provide the children with all the tender loving care they need. Therefore, this is what the grandmother provides --- because her age is the age of love and nurturing."

"He who looks after his parents has a great blessing from God. One day, a young family man said to me: 'Geronta, I'm thinking of adding two small apartments - one for my parents and one for my in-laws - on the first floor of the new house I am building.' You can't imagine how much this thought moved and pleased me! I gave him so many blessings! I wonder why so many couples don't even understand this!"

"Just a few days ago a woman came and told me: 'Father, my mother had a stroke. I'm tired of these eight years of having to turn her first one way and then another.' Can you image? A daughter speaking like that about her mother! 'Well,' I said to her, 'this is simple. I will now pray that you get paralyzed and that your mother recovers, so that she can take care of you.' 'No, no Father!' She shouted. 'How about four years? At least four years,' I responded. 'Aren't you ashamed of yourself? Which is preferable: to have your health with no pains, care for a sick person and have your reward from God, or to be sick and suffer --- unable to move your leg, and have to humble yourself to beg, 'Bring me the bedpan; turn me this way; turn me that way'?' After she heard all that, she came to her senses somewhat."