

Fire & Light

St. Symeon Orthodox Church

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✠ **April 3, 2016** ✠

Third Sunday of Lent

Sunday of the Cross

St. Nicetas the Confessor (824)

Come, all ye faithful,
let us drink,
not from a well
of earthly water
that passes away,
but as we venerate
the Cross of Christ,
let us drink
from the fountain of light,
for His Cross is our glory!

Fourth Week of Great Lent

- ✠ **Wed. April 6 ~ 6:30pm Presanctified Liturgy (no meal)**
- ✠ **Fri. April 8 ~ 6:30pm Presanctified Liturgy (Lenten Potluck Supper)**

➤ **This Saturday, April 9 ~ Children's Lenten Retreat: 10:00am to 5:00pm**

➤ **Saturday, April 16 ~ Adult Lenten Retreat 10:00am – 4:00pm - Fr. Demetrios Carellas of Nativity of the Theotokos Monastery, Saxonburg, PA**

✠ " **'My God, my God, look upon me, why have you forsaken me** (Ps. 22:1; Mt. 27:46)?'... Our Lord Jesus Christ is not forsaken either by the Father or, as some think, by His own Godhead, which shrank in fear from suffering, abandoning the sufferer. Who applies that argument either to His birth in this world in the first place or to His ascent of the cross? No, in Himself... He expresses our condition. We had once been the forsaken and disregarded; then we were accepted and now are saved by the sufferings of the impassible. He made our thoughtlessness and waywardness His own, just as the psalm, in its subsequent course, says (Ps. 22:1-3) - since the Twenty-Second Psalm clearly refers to Christ."

St. Gregory the Theologian

✠ "...If after the Cross all idolatry was overthrown, while every manifestation of demons is driven away by this Sign, and Christ alone is worshipped and the Father known through Him, and, while gainsayers are put to shame, He daily invisibly wins over the souls of these gainsayers, - how, one might fairly ask them, is it still open to us to regard the matter as human, instead of confessing that He Who ascended the Cross is Word of God and Saviour of the World? But these men seem to me quite as bad as one who should traduce the sun when covered by clouds, while yet wondering at his light, seeing how the whole of creation is illumined by him."

St. Athanasius the Great

REFLECTION on the Cross ~ St. Nikolai of Serbia, Prologue

Even in His pain on the Cross, the Lord Jesus did not condemn sinners but offered pardon to His Father for their sins saying, "They know not what they do!" (St. Luke 23:34). Let us not judge anyone so that we will not be judged. For no one is certain that before his death he will not commit the same sin by which he condemns his brother. Saint Anastasius of Sinai teaches, "Even if you see someone sinning, do not judge him for you do not know what the end of his life will be like. The thief, crucified with Christ, entered Paradise and the Apostle Judas went to Hell. Even if you see someone sinning, bear in mind that you do not know his good works. For many have sinned openly and repented in secret; we see their sins, but we do not know their repentance. That is why, brethren, let us not judge anyone so that we will not be judged."

From the Holy Fathers

"..For the honor of fasting consists not in abstinence from food, but in withdrawing from sinful practices; since he who limits his fasting only to an abstinence from meats, is one who especially disparages it. Dost thou fast? Give me proof of it by thy works! Let not the mouth only fast, but also the eye, and the ear, and the feet, and the hands, and all the members of our bodies. 'Let the mouth too fast from disgraceful speeches and railing. For what does it profit if we abstain from birds and fishes; and yet bite and devour our brethren?'"

St. John Chrysostom - "On the Statues" – 4th C

We are Not without Hope

✠ "We are not without hope of salvation, nor is it at all the right time for us to despair. All our life is a season of repentance, for God 'desires not the death of the sinner', as it is written, 'but that the wicked turn from his way and live' (cf. Ez. 33:11 LXX). For, if there were no hope of turning back, why would death not have followed immediately on disobedience, and why would we not be deprived of life as soon as we sin? For where there is hope of turning back, there is no room for despair."

St. Gregory Palamas

No Greater Joy

"There is no greater joy for a human being than sincere repentance, there is no greater happiness than forgiving one who just recently was an opponent - that is in fact the heavenly gift of Freedom granted to man by Almighty God, the gift for which the Son of God Himself accepted death on the Cross, i.e. for our salvation, to make possible man's rebirth and transfiguration. Without that, there would be no Christianity..."

"Everything in our interrelations comes down to love; without it, nothing has any meaning. Where there is love, the unsatisfied thirst of ambition, greed, and lust for power all calm down. Where there is love, we, knowing the weakness of others, do not lay upon them heavy burdens grievous to be borne (Matthew 23: 4)... In our day, there are many tears and much suffering, and the warming power of love is so essential so appealing. By the action of the sun's rays, fogs and putrid vapors dissipate; the air becomes clean and transparent. Likewise in the world of morality, under the influence of love, everything revives, brightens, becomes orderly and in proper proportion."

+ Archpriest Nikolai Deputatov (+2002, Australia)

The Cross - St. Cyril of Alexandria

✠ "If at the time of our Lord's Passion He willingly endured many insults with forbearance, and accepted suffering voluntarily for our sake when it was in His power to avoid it, this acceptance of suffering for the good of others is a sign of extraordinary compassion and the highest glory."

✠ "Christ... despising death and the shame that comes from suffering, focused only on the achievements resulting from the suffering. And immediately seeing the death of all of us departing from our midst as the result of the death of His own flesh, and the power of decay about to be completely destroyed, and human nature already formed anew in anticipation of newness of life (cf. Rom. 6:4).

✠ "THE foolish man loves himself and cannot love his brother or God, he can neither refrain from pleasure nor from the desires that give him satisfaction, nor can he endure pain. Sometimes he gets what he wants, and then he is filled with pleasure and elation; sometimes he does not get it and, completely dominated by the pain which this engenders, he is cast down and dejected, experiencing a foretaste of hell."

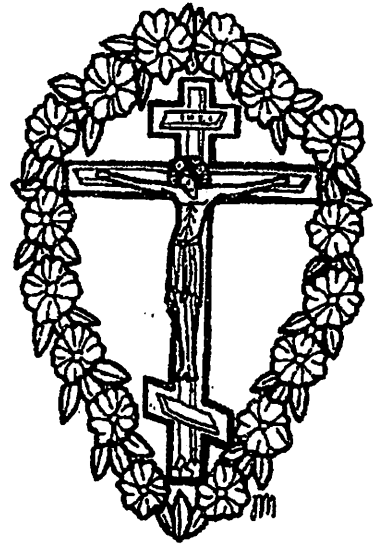
St. Peter of Damascus (11th C)

THE VENERATION OF THE CROSS

The Third Sunday of Lent is called "The Veneration of the Cross." At the Vigil of that day, after the Great Doxology (Matins), the Cross is brought in a solemn procession to the center of the church and remains there for the entire week — with a special rite of veneration following each service. It is noteworthy that the theme of the Cross which dominates the hymnology of that Sunday is developed in terms not of suffering but of victory and joy. More than that, the theme-songs (*hirmoi*) of the Sunday Canon are taken from the Paschal Service — "The Day of the Resurrection" — and the Canon is a paraphrase of the Easter Canon.

The meaning of all this is clear. We are in Mid-Lent. On the one hand, the physical and spiritual effort, if it is serious and consistent, begins to be felt, its burden becomes more burdensome, our fatigue more evident. We need help and encouragement. On the other hand, having endured this fatigue, having climbed the mountain up to this point, we begin to see the end of our pilgrimage, and the rays of Easter grow in their intensity. Lent is our self-crucifixion, our experience, limited as it is, of Christ's commandment heard in the Gospel lesson of that Sunday: "If any man would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me" (Mk. 8:34). But we cannot take up our cross and follow Christ unless we have HIS Cross which He took up in order to save us. It is His Cross, not ours, that saves us. It is His Cross that gives not only meaning but also power to others. This is explained to us in the Synaxarion of the Sunday of the Cross:

"On this Sunday, the third Sunday of Lent, we celebrate the veneration of the honorable and Life-Giving Cross, and for this reason: inasmuch as in the forty days of fasting we in a way crucify ourselves...and become bitter and despondent and failing, the Life-Giving Cross is presented to us for refreshment and assurance, for remembrance of our Lord's Passion, and for comfort...We are like those following a long and cruel path, who become tired, see a beautiful tree with many leaves, sit in its shadow and rest for a while and then, as if rejuvenated, continue their journey; likewise today, in the time of fasting and difficult journey and effort, the Life-Giving Cross was planted in our midst by the holy fathers to give us rest and refreshment, to make us light and courageous for the remaining task...Or, to give another example: when a king is coming, at first his banner and symbols appear, then he himself comes glad and rejoicing about his victory and filling with joy those under him; likewise our Lord Jesus Christ, Who is about to show us His victory over death, and appear to us in the glory of the Resurrection Day, is sending to us in advance His scepter, the royal symbol — the Life-Giving Cross — and it fills us with joy and



makes us ready to meet, inasmuch as it is possible for us, the King Himself, and to render glory to His victory...All this in the midst of Lent which is like a bitter source because of its tears, because also of its efforts and despondency...but Christ comforts us who are as it were in a desert until He shall lead us up to the spiritual Jerusalem by His Resurrection...for the Cross is called the Tree of Life, it is the tree that was planted in Paradise, and for this reason our fathers have planted it in the midst of Holy Lent, remembering both Adam's bliss and how he was deprived of it, remembering also that partaking of this Tree we no longer die but are kept alive..."

Thus, refreshed and reassured, we begin the second part of Lent...

-- Taken from, *Great Lent* by
Fr. Alexander Schmemmann

AN EXAMPLE OF HEARTFELT REPENTANCE *By St. Dimitry of Rostov*

The following list was found in an old edition of a prayer book which belonged to an Orthodox Christian who has departed in the Lord. This servant of God wrote little notes on the margins of the worn pages of his prayer book. Because these additions reflect shortcomings common to all contemporary Orthodox, they are included in this slightly abridged list.

Of course, not everyone is guilty of all the transgressions listed. Yet, without doubt, if we honestly and carefully look at this list, if we give it some thought, we will certainly find at least a few familiar deficiencies, and thus territory for work in our daily *podvig* of repentance, as well as that which we will need to confess in the Mystery of Confession.

I believe in the Lord God; yet often because of the vain hassles of everyday life and my attachment to the earthly, the Lord God does not take priority.

I forget about the brevity of life, and that here on earth I must prepare myself to answer before God, and for eternity.

I notice in myself the absence of the fear of God, and am not afraid to sin. I sin often, regularly, and this does not bother me. I console myself with the idea that everyone lives like this. There are no tears of repentance, no repentant torment.

At times I do not pray, and when I do, the prayer is short, inattentive, lacks concentration. In various circumstances of life I rarely turn to God, praying for assistance and instruction.

The Cross is Evidence of God's Great Providential Care, His Goodness and His Love

~ St. John Chrysostom



“When we are praising our common Master on account of everything, do we not especially praise and glorify Him because we are amazed at the Cross and His accursed death? Does not Paul - at every turn - reckon it a sign of His love for us that He died? That He died for people such as we are? Leaving aside speaking of Heaven, the earth, the sea and everything else that Christ created for our use and refreshment, Paul dwells on the Cross at every turn, saying: *‘But God commendeth His love towards us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us’* [Romans 5:8].”

“And for this cause, Paul offers us good hopes, saying: *‘For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more - being reconciled - we shall be saved by His life’* [Romans 5:10]. Is it not in this that Paul himself especially glories - because of which he is high-spirited, he leaps up, he flies out of delight - writing thus to the Galatians: *‘But God forbid that I should glory, save in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ’* [Galatians 6:14]? And why are you amazed if Paul leaps and jumps and exults on account of the Cross? He Himself, Who endured these sufferings called it “glory.” *‘Father,’* He said, *‘the hour is come. glorify Thy Son’* [John 17:1].”

“And the disciple who wrote these things said: *‘For the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus had not been glorified’* [John 7:39], calling the Cross “glory.” He too, when he wanted to show the love of Christ, what did he speak about? Signs, wonders, certain marvels? By no means. Instead, he brings up the Cross, saying: *‘God so loved the world that He gave His Only Begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life’* [John 3:16]. And again, Paul says: *‘He Who spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?’* [Romans 8:32].”

“And when [St. Paul] is advocating humility, it is on this basis that he constructs his exhortation, saying: *‘If there be ... any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any tenderness and mercies, fulfill ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem the other better than himself’* [Phil. 2:1-3]. Then, bringing forward his counsel, he says: *‘Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus, Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God; but made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Himself the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men. And being found in the fashion of man, He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross’* [Phil. 2:5-8].”

“Giving counsel concerning love, Paul again brings in the Cross, saying: *And walk in love; as Christ hath also loved us, and hath given Himself for us as an offering and a sacrifice to God, a sweet-smelling savor* [Eph. 5:2]. And in joining wives together with their husbands in oneness of mind, he says: *Husbands, love your wives, even as also Christ loved the Church, and gave Himself for it* [Eph. 5:25]. Christ Himself showed how much He sought after the Cross and how strongly He desired the suffering. When the preeminent of the apostles [St. Peter] ... said out of ignorance: *Be it far from Thee, Lord; this shall not happen unto Thee*, Listen to what Christ called him: *Get thee behind Me Satan! Thou art an offense to Me* [Matt. 16:22-23]. By the extreme degree of the rebuke and the censure, Christ showed His great eagerness toward the Cross.”

“He accomplished the Resurrection secretly and in private, entrusting its proof to times to come. But He endured the Cross in the midst of the city, in the midst of the feast, in the midst of the people of the Jews, in the presence of both law courts - that of the Romans and that of the Jews - when the feast had gathered everyone together, in the middle of the day in sight of the whole world. And since only those present saw what was done, He ordered the sun, by concealing itself, to announce the shameless act to the entire world. Indeed, as I have said before, it was a scandal to many; but we should not pay heed to them, but to those who are being saved — to the righteous.”

“And why do you marvel if, in the present life, the Cross is so radiant that Christ calls it glory and Paul boasts of it? For in that fearful and awe-inspiring day, when Christ comes showing forth His glory, when He comes in the glory of His Father, when the fearful judgment seat is present, when the entire race of man is in attendance, when rivers of fire are bubbling, when companies of angels and the powers above - all at once - stream upon Him, when there are countless rewards, when some shine like the sun and others like the stars, when companies of martyrs, when choirs of apostles, when regiments of prophets, when assemblies of noble men are all led forward before all — then indeed in that brightness, in that splendor, Christ will come carrying the bright shining Cross.”

Jacob and Israel

St. Nicodemus of the Holy Mt. reminds us that “the heart of man was created by God always to return to God and behold its Creator.” This “return” involves the following two stages:

In the first stage, we must become “Jacob” (“supplanter”), which is to say that we must become supplanters of the passions, of the devil, and of sin, by means of “practical virtue,” that is, “through fasting, vigils, prostrations, sleeping on the ground, prayer, hardships, and other bodily exertions.”

In the second stage, we must become “Israel” (“mind that beholds God”), by means of “theoretical virtue”; that is, “through noetic prayer practiced in the heart, we must ascend to what is called the illumination of Divine Grace, which acts and exists in the heart, and, thereby, raise ourselves—or, rather, be raised—by Grace to supernatural and immediate theoria, or, more precisely, to the vision of God.”

“The Moral Lives of Young Adults

“*All that society is, apparently, is a collection of autonomous individuals who are out to enjoy life.*”

Rod Dreher: Excerpt from a 2009 book by sociologist Christian Smith and his research team, called *Lost In Transition: The Dark Side of Emerging Adulthood*.

It (this book) talks about the inner lives — the moral lives — of young adults, ages 18-23. It is a depressing study to read. Too many details to get into here, but the basic finding is that most Americans of that generation believe in nothing outside their own feelings, and cannot even make an argument for much of anything. It's all about what they feel. They are completely obsessed by material, sensate culture, and aspire to nothing higher than being comfortable, entertained, and happy. Here's an excerpt from the book:

“Ultimately we come back to core existential questions. What are humans? Do they have any purpose? If so, what is it? What is good in life and the world? How do we make sense of suffering, tragedy, evil, and death? Are history and the world going somewhere meaningful, or is it all just random chance? Our point is not to push particular answers to these questions. Our point is that human beings and cultures recurrently, inescapably ask and answer these questions one way or another. For better or worse, people and cultures recurrently find themselves drawn to answers that reflect horizons that are higher, bigger, more transcendent, or more meaningful than the prosaic, immanent, natural, mundane world. Humanity can live for some time on mere bodily comfort and material security. But over time that does not seem to satisfy the human spirit. Such a limited horizon cannot last. Either material security gives way or the human spirit seeks to push beyond it. If so, then the standard cultural horizons of most emerging adults today, and thus of the culture that has raised them, cannot be said to reflect a high point of the human imagination and aspirations.”

The authors emphatically do not blame these emerging adults, but rather the older adults — parents, teachers, churches, communities, institutions — who formed them. “But if these emerging adults are lost, it is because the larger culture and society into which they are being inducted is also lost,” the authors write. More:

“We are failing to teach them how to deal constructively with moral, cultural, and ideological differences. We are failing to teach them to think about what is good for people and in life. We are failing to equip our youth with the ideas, tools, and practices to know how to negotiate their romantic and sexual lives in healthy, nondestructive ways that prepare them to achieve the happy, functional marriages and families that most of them say they want in future years. We are failing to teach our youth about life purposes and goals that matter more than the accumulation of material possessions and material comfort and security. We are failing to challenge the too-common need to be intoxicated, the apparent inability to live a good, fun life without being under the influence of alcohol or drugs. And we are failing to teach our youth the importance of civic engagement and political participation, how to be active citizens of their communities and nation, how to think about and live for the common good. On all of these matters, if our analysis is correct, the adult world is simply abdicating its responsibilities.”

“Moreover, if our analysis is correct, we in the older adult world are failing youth and emerging adults in these crucial ways because our own adult world is itself also failing in those same ways. It is not that the world of mainstream American adults has something great to teach but is simply teaching it badly. That would also be a problem, but at least a remediable one. Rather, we suspect that the adult world is teaching its youth all too well. But what it has to teach too often fails to convey what any good society needs to pass on to its children.”

"In short, if our sociological analysis in this book is correct, the problem is not simply that youth are bad students or that adults are poor teachers. It is that American culture itself seems to be depleted of some important cultural resources that it would pass on to youth if it had them — and yet not just for "moral" but also for identifiable institutional reasons, as repeatedly noted above. In which case, not only emerging adulthood, but American culture itself also has a dark side as well."

"The point of the book is not that Millennials are bad people, but rather that they have not been given any clear way to determine what is right and what is wrong, and how to use their reason. So they fall back on what feels right in a given moment. We have thrown our kids into the deep end of a pool, but failed to teach them how to swim."

And look at this finding:

"What we have found so far is, first, that 61 percent of emerging adults we interviewed have no problems or concerns with American materialism and mass consumerism. These emerging adults are essentially quite happy with our social system of shopping, buying, consuming, and disposing. Second, another 30 percent of emerging adults mention certain concerns about mass consumerism, but none they think they can do anything about and none that especially affects how they personally think or live. ... Structuring and governing the outlooks of nearly all of the 91 percent of interviewed emerging adults represented above is the dominant cultural paradigm of liberal individualism. ... All that society is, apparently, is a collection of autonomous individuals who are out to enjoy life." This is who we are. This is who we have raised our kids to be, whether we intended to or not. Smith et al. warn against "doom-and-gloomers," though I'm not quite sure why, and they also warn against older adults who say, "Aww, that's how kids are, they'll grow out of it." That's a dangerous complacency, they say. And they also warn against drawing firm conclusions based on anecdotal data. They say there's a lot of bad journalism out there that sees, for example, young people volunteering for political campaigns, and concludes, "See, the kids really are all right. They're engaged!" The sociological data do not remotely justify that conclusion.

It is not going to get any better in the foreseeable future, only worse, and more difficult. This is why we orthodox Christians who want to resist the spirit of the age, and who want to raise kids able to be resilient, need the Benedict Option. Church youth group, parochial or religious school, and church on Sunday is not enough. Not remotely enough.

Smith et al. found that most of the emerging adults (EAs) they studied have no way to think through moral and ethical dilemmas. None. They go with their gut. They are terrified of proclaiming moral rules that everyone should follow, lest they seem judgmental. Broadly speaking, they believe that if an action makes you happy, then it is good, for you — even if they themselves could not imagine doing the same thing. "Moral individualism" is the rock upon which their inner lives are built, with "moral relativism" a significant additional source for many of them. If they feel something is true or right, then it must be so.

The point, as the authors say above, is not that there is something wrong with the Millennial generation (though there is); the point is that the moral vacancy of the young indicates that there is something wrong with America. We have become the sort of country in which most people decide right and wrong based on what they desire. Reasoned deliberation based on an objective set of principles is not what we do.

➤ **Christianity is not a religion. It is a spiritual path towards union with God. Jesus did not come to usher in a new system of how to get what we want. He "emptied Himself," and repeatedly invited us to do the same. That emptying is the path of union, and the very definition of love. If unfulfilled desires can be of use to us, then this world becomes the perfect arena of our salvation. For, in truth, we generally do not have to become weak or incompetent in order to be saved. We already are. Those who are on the path know this and reveal it in their prayers.**

~ Fr. Stephen Freeman