



Sunday of the Holy Cross: The Reading is from Mark 8:34-38; 9:1

The Lord said: "If anyone wishes to come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. For what does it profit a man, to gain the whole world and forfeit his life? For what can a man give in return for his life? For whoever is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of man also be ashamed, when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels." And he said to them, "Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God come with power."

The commemoration and ceremonies of the Third Sunday of Lent are closely parallel to the feasts of the Veneration of the Cross (September 14) and the Procession of the Cross (August 1). Not only does the Sunday of the Holy Cross prepare us for commemoration of the Crucifixion, but it also reminds us that the whole of Lent is a period when we are crucified with Christ. The Cross reminds us of the Passion of our Lord, and by presenting to us His example, it encourages us to follow Him in struggle and sacrifice, being refreshed, assured, and comforted. In other words, we must experience what the Lord experienced during His Passion - being humiliated in a shameful manner. The Cross teaches us that through pain and suffering we shall see the fulfillment of our hopes: the heavenly inheritance and eternal glory. Moreover, as the Holy Cross is called the Tree of Life, it is placed in the middle of the Fast, as the ancient tree of life was placed in the middle of the garden of Eden. By this, our Holy Fathers wished to remind us of Adam's gluttony as well as the fact that through this Tree has condemnation been abolished. Therefore, if we bind ourselves to the Holy Cross, we shall never encounter death but shall inherit life eternal.

Apolytikion of 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.

Kontakion

O Champion General, I your City now inscribe to you Triumphant anthems as the tokens of my gratitude, Being rescued from the terrors, O Theotokos. Inasmuch as you have power unassailable, From all kinds of perils free me, so that unto you I may cry aloud: Rejoice, O unwedded Bride.

Prayer of St. Ephraim

O Lord and Master of my life, take from me the spirit of laziness, despair, evil imagination and vain talking. Bestow on me, Thy servant, the spirit of purity, humility, patience and love.

Lord and Master of my life, grant me to see my own faults and not judge my neighbor.

For blessed are Thou unto the ages of ages. Amen.

Discussion

St. Ephraim's prayer, especially meaningful during Lent, is a good reminder of the struggles we endure in our lives. As we are reminded on this Sunday, the Lenten midpoint, that Christ's destination was to endure the Cross for us so that our journey can end in salvation, the Cross stands as our symbol of His Love for us.

We must first go with our Lord to the cross; we too must die in order to rise again. And the unpopular truth is that every last one of us needs to die to our sinfulness, to how we have distorted ourselves, our relationships, and our world. The Son of God offered Himself in free obedience to the Holy Trinity, taking upon Himself the full consequences of sin and death to the point of a horrible execution; He did so out of love for us. And thus He opened the way to the Kingdom of heaven, to life eternal, for you, me, and all humankind; indeed, for the entire creation.

Fortunately, we do not go to the cross alone. No matter what we are tempted to think at times, our Savior is no stranger to temptation, suffering, pain, and death. He sympathizes with our struggles because He endured them.

Let us offer our lives in free obedience to the Father, accepting whatever pain and struggle there may be in setting things right in our lives as best we can. And no matter what burdens we may bear, no matter our frustrations and failures, let us press on the joy of Pascha. Jesus Christ participated in death in order to bring us into His life, and we must participate in His death in order to share in the glory of His resurrection. So let us deny ourselves, take up our crosses, and follow Him. For this alone is the way to the brilliant light and eternal blessedness of the Kingdom of God.

From the Gospel text before this Sunday's:

When St. Peter tried to correct Him, Christ called him "Satan" and said that he was thinking in human terms, not God's. Then the Lord told the disciples what they didn't want to hear. They too must take up their crosses and lose their lives; that's the way to enter into the blessed salvation of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Keep your faith and fight the good fight!