

The Cross in the Holy Fathers

As an Opening Prayer

O Saviour, the true sweetness, who of old didst sweeten the bitter waters of Marah, thereby prefiguring at that time the wood of the divine Cross: How were You nailed thereto, O Sinless One; how were You given gall to drink and pierced in the side, and how did the Blood and water pour forth forgiveness, unto the refashioning of mortal nature? Wherefore, we glorify Your ineffable mercy, and we entreat You O Lord, in the season of the fast, grant us the fear of You, and the forgiveness of our offences, and great mercy.

Vespers Stichera for Thursday of the 4th Week

“A Few Drops of Blood Renew the Whole World”

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 was shaken, the rocks shattered because of the Rock; the dead risen to bear witness of the final and universal resurrection of the dead. The happenings at the Sepulchre, and after the Sepulchre, who can fittingly recount them? Yet not 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 milk: joining us and binding us together. *St. Gregory the Theologian*

Paradise Regained

... The holy Fathers relate that when the thief of the Gospel, too, came to the gates of the Kingdom, the Archangel with the flaming

sword wanted to chase him away, but he showed him the Cross. Immediately the fire-bearing Archangel himself withdrew and permitted the thief to enter. Understand here not the wooden cross. But which? The Cross in which the chief Apostle Paul boasts and concerning which he writes, 'I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus (Gal. 6:17). ' *A Collection of Letters to Nuns by St. Anatoly of Optina*

In Paradise of old, the tree stripped me bare, for by the eating thereof, the enemy brought in death. But now the most holy tree of the Cross that doth clothe all men with the garment of life hath been set up on earth, and all of the world is filled with most boundless joy. Seeing it exalted, ye people, now, let us the faithful all cry out with one accord to God in faith: Thy house is full of glory, O Lord. *Feast of the Elevation of the Holy Cross - Sessional Hymn of the Canon*

The Most-High planted in the middle of Paradise The thrice blessed wood, the gift of life for us, In order that, in approaching it, Adam might find eternal and immortal life, But he did not strive earnestly to know this life, And he failed to attain it, and revealed death. However, the robber, seeing how the plant in Eden Had been beautifully transplanted in Golgotha, Recognized the life in it and said to himself: 'This is what my father lost formerly In Paradise.' *St Romanos the Melodist - On the Adoration at the Cross*

When the first creature was shut out from Paradise, an order was given to the Cherubim to guard the road; But take My cross on your shoulders, and thus go into Eden with haste. If the sword of the Cherubim did not see you wearing the title rights of the inscription, the sword of flame which stands guard would consume you, but, taking the inscription of My cross, robber, walk up to the Cherubim, and they will know the symbol of life and they will give into your

hands The power to open and to lead My friends Into Paradise.
The Kontakia of Romanos, On the Adoration at the Cross

From Bitterness to Sweetness

"As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up" (John 3:14). And just exactly as all who were bitten by the serpents looked upon the bronze serpent which was suspended and were healed, thus also every Christian who believes in our Christ and has recourse to His life-bearing wounds, who eats His Flesh and drinks His all-holy Blood, is cured of the bits of the spiritual serpent of sin and by this most holy nourishment is made to live unto the renewal of a new creation, that is, new life in harmony with His life-giving commandments.

Elder Ephraim of Philotheou Mount Athos, "Counsels from the Holy Mountain"

Moses wrought a parable in the wilderness in the sight of the Hebrews, and our Lord interpreted it when He taught with uplifted voice: 'As Moses.' He said, 'lifted up the serpent in the wilderness for the people, so shall I be lifted up for the whole world to behold Me.' Moses learnt from the Lord the great image he depicted in the desert, and perceived that it was His. 'As Moses lifted up the serpent, so must I be lifted up,' He said, 'Let any that is bitten come and look on Me, and he shall be healed by Me. The great serpent bit Eve amid the trees, but lo, I am lifted up, and if she looks on Me, I shall heal her. The demons have fallen on the world and bitten it like vipers; Meet it is that I be lifted up like that serpent Moses made.' Among the trees the serpent bit the mother of the races, and his gall spread throughout her stock, making it corrupt. To this intent was the Crucified lifted up on Golgotha, that men should look upon Him, and that the slain should live.

*Mar Jacob of Serugh,
Homily on the Serpent of Brass that Moses Lifted up in the Desert.*

The soul has followed Moses and the cloud, both of these serving as guides for those who would advance in virtue; Moses here represents the commandments of the Law; and the cloud that leads the way, its spiritual meaning. The soul has been purified by crossing the Sea; it has removed from itself and destroyed the enemy army. It has tasted of the waters of Marah, that is, of life deprived of all sinful pleasure; and this at first had seemed bitter and unpleasant to the taste but offered a sensation of sweetness to those who accepted the wood. Next it enjoyed the beauty of the palm trees of the gospel and the springs; it filled itself with the living water, that is, the rock. It took within itself the bread of heaven. It overwhelmed the foreign host - a victory due to the extended arms of the Lawgiver, which thus foreshadowed the mystery of the Cross. Only then can the soul go on to the contemplation of transcendent Being.

St. Gregory of Nyssa, From Glory to Glory

Healing Words from Christ Crucified

But we are able to see Christ's inexpressible love for man not only from the cross itself but also from the words which He spoke whilst upon the cross. At the very time when He was nailed and they were mocking Him, deriding Him and spitting upon Him, He said: "Father, forgive them for they do not know what they do" (Luke 23:34)... at the same time that they were saying: "If You are the Son of God save Yourself," He was accomplishing everything necessary to save these same ones who were reproaching Him. ... He did forgive them, if they wished to repent, because if He had not forgiven them this sin, Paul would not have become an apostle; if He had not forgiven them this sin, the three thousand and the five thousand, and the many other thousands, would not have immediately believed.

Homily by St. John Chrysostom, Concerning the Cross and the Thief

Baptism is a Cross

Did you see how baptism is a cross? Learn that even Christ called baptism the cross when He used the name of baptism interchangeably [with that of the cross]. He called your baptism a cross. 'I call my baptism a cross,' he says. Where does He say this? 'I have a baptism to be baptized with, of which you do not know.' And how is it clear that He is speaking of the cross? The sons of Zebedee came up to Him - rather, the mother of the sons of Zebedee, saying 'Command that these my two sons may sit, one at thy right and one at thy left hand, in thy kingdom.' A mother's request, even if it was an inconsiderate one! How then did Christ answer? 'Can you drink of the cup of which I am about to drink, and be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?' You see that He called the cross a baptism. *St. John Chrysostom, Baptismal Instructions*

Noah's Ark marked out by its course the sign of its Preserver. The Cross of its Steersman and the Wood of its Sailor Who has come to fashion for us a Church in the waters of baptism: with the three-fold name He rescues those who reside in her, and in place of the dove, the Spirit administers her anointing and the mystery of her salvation. Praise to her Saviour.

St. Ephraim the Syrian on Faith from "The Luminous Eye"
translated by Sebastian Brock

We have been born anew through baptism and restored by the tree of the cross. The passion of the Lord effects the resurrection of our race and its readiness by grace to paradise whence it had fallen by sin freely willed. When Christ provided for us the refuge of his cross, the Lord destroyed the sting of death which was reigning over us. *St Benedict of Nursia, from "The Rule of the Master" - (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Cistercian Publications, 1977), pp. 95 - 101*

The Sign of the Cross – Christ Suffered and Died for All

Explanation of the Cross Which we Wear about the Shoulders on a Cord...

Take heed also concerning the Cross which you wear about your shoulders. Remember the covenant which exists between you and Christ Himself. When you emerged forth from the baptismal font, you promised to be a servant of Christ and venerate His Crucifixion, the Cross of Christ, and you were signed with the Cross of Christ and received from the priest's hand the Cross of Christ, which you placed on your shoulders. You accepted Christ's covenant, whereby you promised to follow Christ according to the Gospel; as it is written: "He who doers not take up his Cross and follow me, is not worthy of Me." You have taken up the Cross and promised to follow Christ. Be mindful then, that you wear upon your body the image of the Cross of Christ, upon which He voluntarily suffered for our salvation. This is God's covenant; this is the ensign of Christ the King: this is the standard of the heavenly hosts; therewith you will be known as a servant of Christ.

If anyone ask you, "What is that?", answer him as follows, as it is written: "I bear on my body the marks of the Lord Jesus." If he says, "Where is it written, and who has commanded this?", tell him that the Lord carried the cross when He went to His voluntary Passion. It was He Who charged us who believe in Him to carry the Cross. As the divine Luke says, "They laid hold upon one Simon, a Cyrenian, coming out of the country, and upon him they laid the Cross that he might bear it after Jesus." At that time, also, the wise thief by the cross entered Paradise. But if the man reproaches you but makes further inquiries, flee from him quickly, for he is not a believer. For when a man is overly inquisitive about things divine, he may have a deep heart, but God is exalted over him, and he descends to hell, because he seeks to know what is above him, but does not keep that which has been handed down to him. *An Old Orthodox Prayer Book*

Glory, O Lord, to the power of Thy Cross, which never fails! When the enemy oppresses me with a sinful thought or feeling, and I, lacking freedom in my heart, make the sign of the Cross several times with faith, suddenly my sin falls away from me, the compulsion vanishes, and I find myself free... For the faithful the Cross is a mighty power which delivers from all evils, from the malice of the invisible foe. *St. John of Kronstadt*

Why do we honour the Cross with such reverence that we make mention of its power in our prayers after asking for the intercession of the Mother of God and the Heavenly Powers, before asking for that of the Saints, and sometimes even before asking for that of the Heavenly Powers? Because after the Saviour's sufferings, the Cross became the sign of the Son of Man, that is, the Cross signifies the Lord Himself, incarnate and suffering for our salvation. *St. John of Kronstadt, My Life in Christ*

"Far be it for me to glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Gal. 6:14).

Truly this symbol is thought despicable; but it is so in the world's reckoning, and among men; in Heaven and among the faithful it is the highest glory. Poverty too is despicable, but it is our boast; and to be cheaply thought of by the public is a matter of laughter to them, but we are elated by it. So too is the Cross our boast. He does not say, 'I boast not,' nor, 'I will not boast,' but, 'Far be it from me that I should,' as if he abominated it as absurd, and invoked the aid of God in order to his success therein. And what is the boast of the Cross? That Christ for my sake took on Him the form of a slave, and bore His sufferings for me the slave, the enemy, the unfeeling one; yea, He so loved me as to give Himself up to a curse for me. What can be comparable to this? *St. John Chrysostom, Homilies on Galatians*

The cross is the door to mysteries. Through this door the intellect makes entrance in to the knowledge of heavenly mysteries. The knowledge of the cross is concealed in the sufferings of the cross. And the more our participation in its sufferings, the greater the perception we gain through the cross. For, as the Apostle says, 'For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds through Christ.' (2 Corinthians 1:5)

The Ascetical Homilies of St. Isaac of Syria

Taking Up our own Cross

God does not create a cross for man. No matter how heavy a cross a man may carry in life, it is still just wood, from which man himself made, and it always grows from the soil of his heart. *St. Ambrose of Optina (+1891)*

Of course, it would be easier to get to paradise with a full stomach, all snuggled up in a soft featherbed, but what is required is to carry one's cross along the way, for the kingdom of God is not attained by enduring one or two troubles, but many! *Elder Anthony of Optina*

The one who knows God will follow the Lord's footsteps, bearing the cross of the Saviour. It is said, "The world is crucified to him and he to the world." The Lord says, "He who loses his life will save it." We can "lose our lives" in one of two ways. First, we can risk our lives just as the Lord did for us. Secondly, we can separate our lives from the customary things of this world. Bearing the cross means to separate our souls from the delights and pleasures of this life. If you do this, you will find your life again - resting in the hope of what is to come. Dying to ourselves means being content with the necessities of life. When we want more than these necessities it is easy to sin. *St. Clement of Alexandria on 'The One Who knows God'.*

What does it mean to take up your cross? It means the willing acceptance, at the hand of Providence, of every means of healing, bitter though it may be, that is offered. Do great catastrophes fall on you? Be obedient to God's will, as Noah was. Is sacrifice demanded of you? Give yourself into God's hands with the same faith as Abram had when he went to sacrifice his son. Is your property ruined? Do your children die suddenly? Suffer it all with patience, cleaving to God in your heart, as Job did. Do your friends forsake you, and you find yourself surrounded by enemies? Bear it all without grumbling, and with faith that God's help is at hand, as the apostles did.

Bishop Nikolai Velimirovich, Homilies, Vol. 1

To Deny Oneself

The first duty of a Christian, of a disciple and follower of Jesus Christ, is to deny oneself. To deny oneself means to give up one's bad habits, to root out of the heart all that ties us to the world; not to cherish bad desires and thoughts; to quench and suppress bad thoughts; to avoid occasions of sin; not to do or desire anything from self-love but to do everything out of love for God. To deny oneself means, according to the Apostle Paul, to be dead to sin and the world, but alive to God.

St. Innocent of Alaska, Indication of the Way into the Kingdom of Heaven

Epilogue

Shine, Cross of the Lord, shine with the light of thy grace upon the hearts of those that honour thee. With love inspired by God, we embrace thee, O desire of all the world. Through thee our tears of sorrow have been wiped away: we have been delivered from the snares of death and have passed over to unending joy. Show us the glory of thy beauty and grant to us thy servants the reward of our abstinence, for we entreat with faith thy rich protection and great

mercy. Hail! life-giving Cross, the fair Paradise of the Church, Tree of incorruption that brings us the enjoyment of eternal glory: through thee the hosts of demons have been driven back; and the hierarchies of angels rejoice with one accord, as the congregations of the faithful keep the feast. Thou art an invincible weapon, an unbroken stronghold; thou art the victory of kings and the glory of priests. Grant us now to draw near to the Passion of Christ and to His Resurrection.

Hail! life-giving Cross, unconquerable trophy of the true faith, door to Paradise, succour of the faithful, rampart set about the Church. Through thee the curse is utterly destroyed, the power of death is swallowed up, and we are raised from earth to heaven: invincible weapon, adversary of demons, glory of martyrs, true ornament of holy monks, haven of salvation bestowing on the world great mercy. Come, Adam and Eve, our first father and mother, who fell from the choir on high through the envy of the murderer of man, when of old with bitter pleasure ye tasted from the tree in Paradise. See, the Tree of the Cross, revered by all, draws near! Run with haste and embrace it joyfully, and cry to it with faith: O precious Cross, thou art our succour; partaking of thy fruit, we have gained incorruption; we are restored once more to Eden, and we have received great mercy. Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of ages, Amen.

*Great Vespers on Saturday Evening before the Third Sunday of Lent,
The Adoration of the Precious and Life-Giving Cross*