

The Third Sunday of Great Lent
Veneration of the Holy Cross

Mark 8:34-38, 9:1

And when he had called the people unto him with his disciples also, he said unto them, Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it. For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels. And he said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That there be some of them that stand here, which shall not taste of death, till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power. (KJV)

Today is the Sunday of the Cross in the Holy Orthodox Church. The Third Sunday of Great Lent each year focuses on the Cross of the Lord Jesus Christ. Great Lent is well underway.

Believers adhering to the fasting practices of the Church sense within the self the seriousness of the journey to Pascha. The journey to Pascha always includes the Cross of Jesus Christ.

Each person benefits by thinking about the cross in his or her personal life. The cross in personal life is to be addressed in the way Jesus Christ addressed His Cross. Jesus went to the Cross in great humility, with love and forgiveness.

Jesus could have averted His arrest, trial and crucifixion. When approached to be taken into custody, Jesus said to those with Him that He need not be defended by use of the sword.

Jesus was fully aware of the protection available to Him. He said "Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels?" (Mt.26:53)

Today believers do well to draw strength from Jesus Christ's example to face the cross in personal life. Resolutely, with firm faith in Jesus Christ, let us face the cross which life has brought to us.

Our personal cross may be a devastating illness, the sudden loss of a loved one or a difficult and abusive relationship. An addiction, a family member with a serious health problem or a sudden job loss may be the cross we are facing.

Jesus Christ's life, death and Resurrection teaches us by example. The Holy Gospel states Jesus Christ's Cross preceded His Resurrection. The darkness and agony of the Cross came before the joy of the Resurrection.

Let us to look to Jesus Christ for the joy that will be revealed to us in following Him when we take up our cross responsibly in faith. Strong faith and complete trust in Jesus Christ are necessary to heed the words of today's Gospel.

Believers have the benefit of the Gospel to verify the Resurrection followed the Crucifixion. The Gospel account of Jesus' Resurrection gives hope and strength for believers to proceed in dealing with the personal crosses in life.

Each of us may feel pain and agony from our cross. The Lord Jesus Christ is always present to turn to when the pain becomes excruciating. We have Jesus' example of enduring pain and agony before His Resurrection.

We do not know what lies before us. We have Jesus' assurance that if we lose our life for Christ and the Gospel, we will save our life. Jesus gives us the reason to pick up our cross and follow Him.

God's Holy Church puts Jesus' Cross in front of us at this time of Great Lent. The Cross is a source of strength in the Lenten journey. We know that beyond the Cross lies the joy of the Resurrection.

We have the opportunity at each remaining moment of Great Lent to turn to Jesus Christ in prayer. Jesus Christ is present to help us deal with any uncertainty, pain and agony existing within our lives.

Great Lent is the time for serious unity with Jesus Christ. Great Lent is the time for renewal in Christ. The perils and distractions in the world having nothing to do with Christ are to be excluded from our lives during Great Lent.

Great Lent is the time to focus on loving Jesus Christ and living in Christ with great zeal. The hunger in the soul yearns for the unity with Christ which is fully the focus during Great Lent.

The Church provides the atmosphere, the teachings and the wisdom of centuries to guide believers to Paschal joy. The Church helps us with the personal crosses which feel heavy and painful today.

Jesus is here with us to give the strength necessary to face our crosses. Jesus is always present to assist us and strengthen us to face crosses that arise in life. Jesus is love incarnate capable of healing the deepest hurt and deepest pain.

The Resurrection is proof that Jesus Christ defeated the last and greatest human barrier when He defeated death. We benefit from turning to Jesus to learn more about His victory over death.

The Lenten journey provides necessary instruction and nourishment. Holy Week will add vital learning and life-changing opportunities. Focusing on Jesus Christ in the journey to Pascha enables us to address the personal cross in our life.

Our renewal in Christ and our life in Christ are inseparable from the way we deal with the cross in our life. Let us learn from Jesus Christ and look forward to the joy that comes from taking up our cross and following Him.

The Third Sunday of Great Lent. Veneration of the Cross. Venerable Benedict of Nursia. March 14/27, 2022. Hidden Valley, Pennsylvania. Father Rodney Torbic