

SOBORNOST

St. Thomas the Apostle Orthodox Church

**(301) 638-5035 Church
4419 Leonardtown Road
Waldorf, MD 20601**

Rev. Father Joseph Edgington, Pastor

(703) 532-8017

fredgington@gmail.com

www.apostlethomas.org

American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Diocese

*ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE
OF CONSTANTINOPLE*

SERVICES

**Wed: Liturgy of the
Presanctified Gifts 6:00 PM**

Sat: Confession 4:30 PM

Great Vespers 5:00 PM

Sun: Matins (Orthros) 8:45 AM

Sunday School 9:30 AM | Divine Liturgy 10:00 AM

March 19, 2023 – 3rd Sunday in Great Lent

Veneration of the Precious & Life-giving Cross

By Metropolitan Hierotheos of Nafpaktos and Agiou Vlasiou

"Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me." (Mk. 8:38) The Lord wants His disciples to follow Him, lifting up their cross. Christianity is an army of crusaders. The first crusader is Christ and He is followed by those who lift up their cross. With today's homily, however, we will not try to explain what "take up his cross" means. We believe that another opportunity will be given to develop it, because this point is a view that expresses the Orthodox ethos.

Today we want to emphasize the power of the Cross of Christ, which is the glory of the Church and of man, since with His power man lifts his own cross. The Cross of Christ that we especially venerate today is the supernatural and glorious Holy Altar, on which there is the Crucified Lord, Who, as a great High Priest, made the great sacrifice, which was the occasion for the return of all creation to God. Indeed, the Cross is the central point of all creation, the unity of the whole world. We must examine this great truth today, in as little time as possible.



The Divisive Energy of Sin

In order to see the great significance of the Cross we must see the divisive energy of sin. Before the fall there was unity between God, man and all nature. After sin, nature and man were separated from God. Today we know the terrible consequences that come from the disintegration of the individual. But it cannot be compared with the results of the disintegration of the person, because of sin.

According to the teaching of Saint Maximus, sin is not a simple violation of a Law, but the abnormal movement of the natural forces of the soul. That is, man, instead of moving incessantly towards God, who is the source of life and deification, moves towards tangible good things. Thus sin is the deprivation of the good and "the voluntary departure from what is natural and to what is unnatural" according to Saint John of Damascus. Sin, as the deprivation of the good, is also the "first encounter of man with nothingness." Let us look at this "abnormal movement," the divisive energy of sin.

First of all it was man who separated from God. Since God is the Light and the Life of men, we understand that with his removal man was enclosed in darkness and death. He wore the "leather tunic" of decay and mortality. He got to the point where he was ignorant of God and worshiped idols. Moreover people became divided among themselves. Adam, seeing Eve immediately after her creation, rejoiced and said, "This is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh" (Gen. 2:23). But after the sin he said: "The woman you gave me, she gave me of the tree and ate" (Gen. 3:12). From the bone of his bones immediately she became the woman that God gave him.

Man was even divided internally. Before sin all the powers of the soul were united, since God was their center. After the sin, after the center was lost, they were disorganized. The mind thought differently, the heart desired differently and the human will did differently. The link between man and nature was also broken. Man before the fall was king of all nature. But now after the fall he has lost his throne and nature refuses to submit. He needs to shed a lot of sweat to be given the necessities of life. It hides many secrets, which he slowly discovers with the love of God.

Finally, all nature was separated from God. It is submissive and a slave to death. That is, man was the pure mirror through which the Light of God radiated in nature. When the mirror shattered, deep darkness fell throughout the creation.

The Unifying Power of the Cross

All these divisions were united by the Cross of Christ. The Church sings: "You unfolded your palms and united what was previously apart." And Saint Cyril of Alexandria says: "Through the Honorable Cross, there was a release from captivity

that contributed to the unity of souls, and what was formerly divided with haste there came unity of mind and unity of faith." Thus the death of Christ on the Cross and consequently the life-giving wood of the Cross became the beginning of the unity and incorruptibility of all nature.

Specifically, through the Cross man returns to God and unites with Him. He is clothed in the Light and acquires Life. He removes the garment of decay and mortality and puts on the garment of incorruption and immortality. Through the Cross people are united with each other. This really happens in the Church, where people, of any nationality, become brethren among themselves and members of the Body of Christ. The Church sings: "In the midst of the earth you brought salvation, Christ God, for on the Cross you spread out your immaculate hands and gathered all the nations, who cry out: Lord glory to you."

Through the Cross man is united internally. The three powers of the soul that lost their center, God, and became split are now united. The mind thinks what God wants, desires what God wants and the will obeys God's will (Christ-mind, Christ-desire, Christ-will). In the man of the Crucified, in the friend of the Cross, there are not those mental conflicts, of which modern psychology speaks.

Through the Cross man becomes king and nature serves him. We see this in the lives of the Saints, who were also served by the wild beasts, since in them they had the energy of divine Grace and the beasts smelled the fragrance of Adam before the fall.

Through the Cross, all creation returns to God, since the reborn man reflects in nature the Light of Christ. Thus it is illumined and sanctified. This is clearly shown by Byzantine iconography that presents nature as bright. Eventually she too will be free from corruption. The Honorable Cross is the unity of the whole world, because it destroys the only divisive element, sin. "Through the Cross joy has come throughout the world."

Modern people, being far from the Cross, are in the torturous state of division. Unification and peace outside the Cross are impossible. But those who unite with the Crucified, overcome all separations and abolish all divisions. As all light, says a Saint, is concentrated in the sun, so in the Cross is concentrated all the love and peace of the Almighty Christ. *(from johnsanidopoulos.com)*

Today's Epistle Lesson – St. Paul's Letter to the Hebrews 4:14-5:6 EOB

Brethren, Since we have such a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold on firmly to our confession. Certainly, we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our infirmities, but one who has been tempted in all things just as we are, yet without sin. Therefore, let us

approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace for assistance in time of need.

Every high priest is selected from among men and is appointed for their sake in matters pertaining to God, so that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for [their] sins. The high priest can deal gently with those who are ignorant and going astray since he himself is also subject to weakness. Because of this, he must offer sacrifices for the sins of the people, as well as for himself. Moreover, nobody assumes this honor by himself but one is called by God, just as Aaron was. Likewise, Christ did not glorify himself to be made a high priest, but it was God who said to him: “You are my Son: Today I have become your father.” As he says also in another place: “You are a priest forever, According to the order of Melchizedek.”

Today’s Gospel Lesson – Saint Mark 8:34-9:1 EOB

At that time, Jesus called the multitude to himself with his disciples and said to them, “Whoever wants to come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. Indeed, whoever wants to save his life will lose it; and whoever will lose his life for my sake and for the sake of the Good News will save it. What does it profit if someone, to gain the whole world, loses his life? For what will someone give in exchange for his life? Whoever will be ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man also will be ashamed of when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.” Jesus said to them, “Amen, I tell you that there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Kingdom of God come with power.”

A Word From the Holy Fathers

Brethren and fathers, the Annunciation is here and it is the first of the Feasts of the Lord, and we should not simply celebrate as most do, but with understanding and with reverence for the mystery. What is the mystery? That the Son of God becomes son of man, using the holy Virgin as the means, dwelling in her and from her fashioning for himself a temple and becoming perfect man. Why so? *That he might ransom those under the law, as it is written, and that we might receive sonship [Gal. 4:5];* that we may no longer be slaves, but free; no longer subject to the passions, but free of passions; no longer friends of the world, but friends of God; no longer walking according to the flesh, but according to the spirit. *Those who walk according to the flesh, think the things of the flesh; those who walk according to the spirit, the things of the spirit; for the thought of the flesh is death; but the thought of the spirit, life and peace. And so the thought of the flesh is hostile to God, for it is not subject to the law of God. Indeed it cannot be. Those*

who are in the flesh cannot please God [Rom. 8:5-8]. In brief this is the power of the mystery, and this is why we should celebrate spiritually and behave spiritually, with holiness and justice, with love, with gentleness, with peace, with forbearance, with goodness, with the Holy Spirit [2 Cor. 6:6], so that as far as we ourselves are concerned we do not render the dispensation of our Lord Jesus Christ empty and ineffectual. Not only that, but we should both pray and grieve for the world. Why so? Because the Son of God came to save the world, and the world rejects him. Tribes and languages reject him; the barbarian nations reject him, those who have had his holy name invoked upon them reject him, some through abandoning the faith, others through their evil lives. What should he have done and did not do? Being God he became man, he humbled himself, becoming obedient unto death, the death of the cross [Phil. 2:8]; he gave us his body to eat and his blood to drink; he allowed us to call him Father, Brother, Head, Teacher, Bridegroom, Fellow-heir and all the other titles which there is no time to mention now. And still he is rejected, and still he bears it. For, he says, I have not come to judge the world, but to save the world [John 12:47]. What then is there to say, brethren? That the genuine disciples are grieved by the rejections of their fellow-disciples, thus showing love both for the teacher and for the disciples. So too, genuine servants suffer in the same way from the desertions of their fellow-servants. This is why the great Apostle orders that we should offer supplications, prayers, entreaties, thanksgivings on behalf of all mankind, for kings and for all in high positions [1 Tim. 2:1-2]; and elsewhere he says this on the subject, I speak the truth in Christ, I do not lie, my conscience bears witness with me in the Holy Spirit, that I have a great grief and unceasing anguish in my heart; for I have prayed that I might be anathema to Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh [Rom. 9:1-3]. You see the power of love? You see the height of friendship? Moses shows it too when he says to God, If you will forgive them their sin, forgive; if not, wipe me out of the book which you have written [Exodus 32:32]. So we too, as genuine and not counterfeit disciples, should not only look to what concerns ourselves, but we should grieve and pray for our brothers and for the whole world; for by so doing what is pleasing to the Lord we shall become inheritors of eternal life, in Christ Jesus our Lord, to whom be the glory and the might with the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and for ever, and to the ages of ages. Amen.

– St. Theodore the Studite, *Catechesis 64*

An Interpretation of the Lenten Prayer of St. Ephrem the Syrian

Lord and Master of my life, give to me Your servant a spirit of patience.

Oh, how we must ask for this spirit of patience! Oh, how we must acquire patience! After all, the Lord Himself said: “By your patience save your souls”

(Luke 21:19). In patience is the salvation of our soul. Why is it so? Because the Lord Jesus Christ said: "Straight is the gate and narrow is the way that leads to life" (Matthew 7:14). This path is difficult, daunting, and the Lord told us, and the apostles tell us that this path - the path of Christian life - is the path of suffering, the path of sorrows. "In the world you will have sorrow, but fear not, for I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

If so, if the whole Christian path is the path of suffering, the path of sorrows, only in patience is the salvation of the world. We can save our souls only by patience. The Apostle James says in his universal epistle: "My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing" (James 1:2-4).

You see, patience has a perfect effect, patience makes us perfect in its entirety without any flaws. The Apostle Paul says: "You need patience, so that, having done the will of God, you will receive the promise" (Heb. 10:36), - eternal life, the Kingdom of God. Be patient: without patience it is impossible to be saved. This apostle, like all the other apostles, endured many, many great sorrows, persecutions, torments, and in the end – martyrdom. All the apostles suffered likewise, except for John the Theologian, who died a natural death at a ripe old age.

And the apostle Paul says: "Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds" (2 Cor. 12:12). (Everyone saw my apostolic dignity not only in the signs and wonders that I did, but also in my patience). You see how great patience is: the apostle, along with signs and wonders, calls patience a sign of the apostles, a sign of holiness, a sign of the friends of God. He says in another epistle: "But we show ourselves as servants of God, ...in great patience, in tribulations, in difficult circumstances" (2 Cor. 6:1, 4).

To all he showed the sign of an apostle in great patience. And to his disciple, Bishop Timothy, he bequeathed: "But you, a man of God, ...prosper in righteousness, piety, faith, love, patience, meekness" (1 Tim. 6:11). If the apostle had to excel so much in patience, then how can we, such weak Christians, reject this virtue? How can we reject patience when we so easily begin to grumble against God, if He sends the inevitable suffering for Christians? Never, never should one reject patience, for without it the path to the Kingdom of God is absolutely impossible.

You know that great patience is needed even in worldly affairs, what shall we say about our path, about our spiritual life? It is immeasurably more important to us than to worldly people. How are we to acquire patience? Get used to enduring, get

used to not grumbling - and everyone is very inclined to grumble. And, of course, ask God for patience. If we ask God for patience, we will ask for whatever pleases Him, and it will be with us according to the word of Christ: “;If you, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Heavenly Father give good things to those who ask Him” (Matt. 7:11)?

Isn't it such a good thing - patience? A petition for patience is a petition pleasing to God, and God will not abandon, God will help every Christian who calls for patience under the weight of his cross. God will help every unfortunate person, burdened with a large family and languishing in poverty, if they ask for patience. But it happens that evil people also ask for it, walking the dark, sinful path, doing evil at every step; they also, languishing under the weight of their evil life, happen to also ask for patience. And God will not give them patience: for this would mean to facilitate their dark, sinful life, to contribute to it. He will not give it to them, but to all those good ones who humbly ask for patience on their Christian path, the Lord will give patience, as the apostle Paul says: "that you may be able to bear it" (1 Cor. 10:13).

He gives patience, he does not burden anyone beyond their strength, if only they would not fall into cowardice, if only they would remember that our troubles and sufferings, that our grief is nothing compared to what our Lord Jesus Christ endured for us. And therefore, we need to endure a lot, seeking consolation, “looking at the author and perfecter of faith, Jesus, who, instead of the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and sat down at the right hand of the Throne of God. Think of Him who endured such reproach from sinners against Himself, lest you become faint and weak in your souls” (Heb. 12:2-3).

That's what you need to be strengthened, that's where you can draw from, to endlessly draw patience - from the Cross of Christ. Look more often at the Holy Cross, at the Savior Crucified on the Cross, and pray with Ephraim the Syrian: Lord and Master of my life, bestow on Your servant a spirit of patience. Amen.

- St. Luke of Simferopol (*from johnsanidopoulos.com*)

Holy Martyrs Chrysanthos and Daria as Models for Our Lives

by Protopresbyter George Papavarnavas

Saints Chrysanthos and Daria lived in the third century. Saint Chrysanthos was the son of the pagan ruler Polemon. However, he was catechized in the faith of Christ and baptized by a certain Bishop. His father, who was soon informed, tried in different ways to dissuade him, but to no avail. Then the devil whom he worshiped, since idols are energized by demons, advised him to do for his son what he did for Adam. In other words, he dragged him towards disobedience and took him out of Paradise through Eve.

Polemon decided, therefore, to marry Chrysanthos to a pagan girl, hoping to dissuade him and make him return to idolatry, and he forcibly gave him as his wife Daria, a very smart and dynamic woman. However, she verified the famous proverb, that says: "The smart bird is caught by the nose". That is, instead of persuading Chrysanthos to deny Christ, rather he persuaded her to stop worshipping lifeless idols and to worship the living God. He catechized her and then led her to baptism. From then they became one soul in two bodies and worked together as missionaries with enthusiasm and fervent zeal. Their life was indeed venerable, but they "were made worthy of a blessed end". That is, they were made worthy to give their testimony for Christ and seal it with the blood of martyrdom.

Their lives and deeds give us the opportunity to highlight the following: First, in our daily life things do not always come as we want them or plan, which is why we are disappointed, and sometimes even in despair. However, we should be aware that none of these things happen to us by chance, but they are all in the plan of God's love, Who oversees the world and history and provides for our prosperity and salvation. Besides, luck doesn't exist and none of the events in our lives are the result of coincidences. We are responsible for all things, as long as we are free, and when we leave ourselves in the hand of God to oversee us, then He arranges for us always the best way. This is because God didn't create the world to then abandon it, but to oversee it Himself personally and care for all people, for each individual person separately, without, however, violating anyone's freedom. Therefore, everything is overseen by the uncreated providence and love of God. As long as we are obedient to His will and accept all the events that happen in our lives with a disposition of gratitude and glorification towards God, calmly and with the certainty that whatever God wants or allows is all for our good.

When we have patience and especially trust in the providence and love of God, then with the passage of time we understand that all those things we imagined once as an adversity, a setback or a failure proved to actually be a great blessing and a priceless gift from God. Unfortunately, however, our superficiality and impatience do not allow us to savor the benefits of the gift of God. If Saint Chrysanthos didn't have patience with Daria, whom he married in the way described above, then we do not know whether or not she would have been saved and emerged as a martyr and saint.

When our way of life is in accordance with the will of God, then we are open to His Grace and so there takes place in our life what God wants. On the other hand, it is possible God does not want certain events to take place in our lives, but He allows them because He respects our freedom, which He gave us. In the first case God is pleased, that is He delights in what takes place, while in the second case He allows.

Second, the love between spouses is tested daily and so we must constantly renew it and increase it, to be able to withstand the daily difficulties of life. The way of maintaining and increasing it is constant communication with God through prayer, because God is the giver of perfect love. Love in its authentic form is a fruit of the Holy Spirit, that resides in the heart of a person pure of the passions. Usually we complain that we are not loved by others. But the problem is not if they love us, but if we love them. When one truly loves then they have patience and they take care to undertake any decision calmly after fervent prayer.

At this point it should be stressed that anyone can love all people by the Grace of God, but it is impossible to be friends with all, because friendship requires two. That is, you cannot be friends with someone if they don't want to be friends with you, but you can love them and care for them, but you should remain unaffected by their negative behavior and thus ensure your inner peace. When Saint Nektarios was informed, while he was in Egypt, that certain people slandered him with the intention of getting rid of him, he said the following memorable words: "I love them and it is enough for me to maintain tranquility within me."

Whoever is internally fulfilled and has a meaningful life, they are indeed blessed, since they have managed to remain unaffected by the negative behavior of others, and therefore they are free to love and truly rejoice in life. (*from johnsanidopoulos.com*)

Also Commemorated Today

St. Sophia of Slutsk and Minsk (1612).

St. John confessor (1932).

St. Matrona (1938).

Venerable Innocent, monk of Komel (Vologda), disciple of St. Nilus of Sora (1521).

Martyr Pancharius at Nicomedia (302).

Venerable Bassa, nun, of Pskov (1473).

Martyr Dimitri of Tornada (564).

New Martyr Demetrius at Constantinople (1564) (Greek).

Righteous Mary, wife of Vsevelod III (1206).

New Martyr Nicholas of Karamanos in Smyrna (1657).

Alcmund (Alkmund) of Northumbria, King and Martyr (802)

Lactan (Lactinus) of Freshford, Abbot of Clonfert, Ireland, w/w (672)

St. Joseph, foster-father of Christ

St. Kologer

Martyr Adrian, monk of Maasricht (c. 688)

Apollonius and Leontius (Leontinus), early bishops of Braga (unk)(Portugal)

Auxilius, bishop of Killosey (c. 460)

St. Gemus, monk of Moyenmoutier(?) (unk) (France)
St. John the Syrian, abbot of Pinna (6th c.)(Italy)
Sts. Landoald of Lombardy, priest, & Amantius (Amance), dcn, enlighteners of
Limburg (Belgium) (c. 668)
St. Leontius, bishop of Saintes (France)(640)
Martyrs Quintus, Quintilla, Quartilla, Mark, & companions of Sorrento (unk)(Italy)
St. Bertulphe, abbot of Bobbio (640)
St. Chassou, hermit near Mende in Gevaudan (unk)
St. Corbase, abbot of Quimper in Finistere (7th c.)(Brittany)
St. Féglise (Fragaire), bishop of Avranches in Normandy (7th c.)
St. Konvelen, monk of Pointe-St.-Matthew of Finistere (7th c.)(Brittany)
St. Léonce, bishop of Saintes in Aquitaine (640)
St. Mansuet, bishop of the Britons (5th c.)
St. Rigan, hermit near St. Malo (6th-7th c)(Brittany)

Social Team for March 26

Team 3 is up next week - Edgington, Victor Barzykin, R&C Wright. Thank you!

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In Your Prayers – Please Remember... His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch BARTHOLOMEW, His Eminence Metropolitan GREGORY, Fr. Joseph & Family, His Grace Bishop Neofitos of Nyeri & Mt. Kenya, Bennett family, Tatyana & Slava Chumak & family, Luke & Marlena Cooper, Roberta Corson, Jon Church, Tina Crull, Mary Diane David, Marlene Doukas, Linda A. Georgiev, Sandi Hebel, Howl family, Helen P. Janowiak, John M. Janowiak, Andrew Kinn, Kopan family, Helen, Brian, Luke and Mia Mahony, Valentina Makowelski, Susan Matula, Anna Meinhold, David & Kathryn Newman, Bobby Nutter & family, Nicholas Pavlik, Weston Perry & family, John Reece, Mary Reed, Marge Rusnak, Rose Song, Fr. Nectarios & Ia, Mother Virginia Marie & the Carmelite Nuns of Port Tobacco, the suffering people of Ukraine, and those in need of our prayers. (Please advise Fr. Joseph of changes.)