

SUNDAY, APRIL 4, 2021
THIRD SUNDAY OF GREAT LENT
VENERATION OF THE CROSS

The Third Sunday of Lent is that of the Veneration of the Cross. The Cross stands in the midst of the Church in the middle of the lenten season not merely to remind men of Christ's redemption and to keep before them the goal of their efforts, but also to be venerated as that reality by which man must live in order to be saved. "He who does not take up his cross and follow me is not worthy of me" (Mt.10:38).

This Sunday's theme is that in the Cross of Christ crucified lies both "the power of God and the wisdom of God" for those being saved (1 Cor 1:24). This Sunday, in the middle of the Lenten season, the cross stands in the middle of the church, not merely to remind the faithful of Christ's redemption and for them to keep the goal of their Lenten efforts, but also as a reminder: "He who does not take up his cross and follow me is not worthy of me" (Mt 10:38).

For the catechumens since the earliest days of the Church, as well as for the Faithful preparing for Pascha today, the spiritual theme starts to change from personal faith and personal effort, to the objective reality of Jesus Christ. The Church teaches that it is Christ's Cross that saves. One cannot take up his own cross and follow Christ unless one has Christ's cross which He took up to save mankind. Partaking of this tree, one will no longer die, but will be kept alive. This is done to refresh, reassure and to encourage those participating in Great Lent.

As seen in the hymnology, the foundation of the commemoration is the victory and joy of the Cross, not just the suffering of our Lord. The Church fathers equate the life-giving Cross with the tree of life and plant this commemoration in the middle of the Lenten pilgrimage. It was the tree that was planted in the middle of Paradise. It is presented to remind the us of both Adam's bliss in the garden and how his sin deprived him from that bliss. The Holy Cross is actually called the Tree of Life, and 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. Now however, we are instructed to bind ourselves to that Tree and are promised to inherit life eternal rather than death.

The Church also equates the appearance of the Cross at this time to the banners and symbols that precede the return of a victorious king. As before the arrival of the king, his royal standards, trophies, and emblems of victory come in procession and then the king himself appears in a triumphant parade, jubilant and rejoicing in his victory and filling those under him with joy, so does the Feast of the Cross precede the coming of our King, Jesus Christ. It warns us that He is about to proclaim His victory over death and appear to us in the glory of the Resurrection. His Life-Giving Cross is His royal scepter, and by venerating it we are filled with joy, rendering Him glory. Therefore, through our celebration on this Sunday we become ready to welcome our King, who shall manifestly triumph over the powers of darkness.

As they who walk on a long and hard way and are bowed down by fatigue find great relief and strengthening under the cool shade of a leafy tree, so do we Christians (i.e, “little christs”) find comfort, refreshment, and rejuvenation under the Life-giving Cross, which our Fathers “planted” on this Sunday. Thus, we are fortified and enabled to continue our Lenten journey with a light step, rested and encouraged.

The present feast has been placed in the middle of Great Lent for yet another reason. The Cross can be likened to the spring of Marah whose waters the children of Israel encountered in the wilderness. This water was undrinkable due to its bitterness but became sweet when the Holy Prophet Moses dipped the wood into its depth. Likewise, the wood of the Cross sweetens the days of the Fast, which are bitter and often grievous because of our realization of our sin and our resulting tears. Yet Christ comforts us during our course through the desert of the Fast, guiding and leading us by His hand to the spiritual Jerusalem on high prepared for us by the power of His Passion and Resurrection.

GREAT VESPERS

LORD I CALL: Six stikhera of the Resurrection in tone 2, followed by four stikhera from the Triodion

Resurrection, tone 2:

Come, let us worship the Word of God
begotten of the Father before all ages,
and incarnate of the Virgin Mary!
Having endured the Cross, He was buried as He himself desired.//
And having risen from the dead, He saved me, the erring one.

Christ our Savior nailed to the Cross the bond against us,
He voided it and destroyed the dominion of death.//
We fall down before His Resurrection on the third day.

With the Archangels let us praise the Resurrection of Christ!
He is our Savior, our Redeemer.
He is coming with awesome glory and mighty power//
to judge the world which He made.

The Angel proclaimed You as the crucified and buried Master.
He told the women: “Come, see the place where He lay!
He is risen as He said, for He is almighty.”
We worship You, only immortal One.//
O Christ, the Giver of life, have mercy on us!

By Your Cross, You destroyed the curse of the tree.

By Your burial You destroyed the dominion of death.
By Your rising, You enlightened the human race.//
O Benefactor, Christ our God, glory to You!

The gates of death opened to You from fear, O Lord.
When the guards of hell saw You they were afraid,
for You demolished the gates of brass and smashed the iron chains.//
You have led us from the darkness and the shadows of death, and have
broken our bonds.

Triodion, (Special Podoben Melody) tone 5:

Shine O Cross of the Lord!
Shine with the light of grace on the hearts of those honoring you!
O desire of the world, we embrace you with love inspired by God!
By you our tears of sorrow are wiped away,
We are delivered from death, and pass to unending joy!
Show us the glory of your beauty.
And grant to us, your servants,
The rewards of fasting,//
For with faith we beg your protection and great mercy!

Rejoice, O life-giving Cross,
The paradise of the Church
The tree of incorruption that brings us the joy of eternal life!
The demons are driven away by you!
And together the ranks of angels rejoice,
As the congregation of the faithful keeps the feast!
You are a stronghold, an invincible weapon!
You are the victory of kings and the glory of priests!//
Grant us to reach the Passion of Christ and His Resurrection!

Rejoice, O life-giving Cross,
The unconquerable trophy of faith,
Door to paradise, help of the faithful,
And a wall of defense set around the Church!
Through you the curse is destroyed and the power of death is swallowed up,
And we are raised from earth to heaven!
Invincible weapon, adversary of demons,
Glory of the martyrs, true ornament of the holy monks,//
Haven of salvation giving the world great mercy!

Come, our first parents, Adam and Eve,
Who fell through the envy of the murderer of the human race,

With bitter pleasure you ate of the tree in Paradise
Behold, the tree of the Cross now draws near!
Run to embrace it with joy and cry out with faith:
“You are our help, O precious Cross!
From your fruit we have gained incorruption!
We are again restored to Eden,//
And receive great mercy!”

GLORY...Triodion, tone 3

Wishing to restore all men to life,
You accepted crucifixion, O Christ our God.
Burning with boundless love for man,
You took the quill of the Cross in Your hand;
dipping it in ink of royal crimson,
You signed our release with blood-stained fingers.
Though temptations assault us,
may we never forsake You again!
Have mercy on Your despairing people,
O long-suffering Master!//
Arise and fight Your enemies in Your almighty power!

NOW AND EVER... the Dogmatikon in tone 2:

The shadow of the Law passed when grace came;
as the Bush burned, yet was not consumed,
so the Virgin gave birth, yet remained a Virgin.
Instead of a pillar of flame, the Righteous Sun has risen.//
Instead of Moses, Christ, the Salvation of our souls.

LITYA, tone 5:

Beholding You, the Fashioner and Creator of all, hanging naked on the Cross,
all creation was changed with fear and lamented.
The sun withdrew its light, and the earth quaked;
the rocks were rent, and the splendor of the Temple was torn asunder.
The dead rose out of their graves, and the hosts of angels were amazed, saying:
“Oh, the wonder!
The Judge is judged and suffers,//
desiring this for the salvation and renewal of the world.”

APOSTIKHA: All stikhera of the Resurrection in tone 2:

Your Resurrection, O Christ our Savior,
has enlightened the whole universe,

calling back Your creation.//
Glory to You, O almighty Lord!

O Savior, by the Tree You destroyed the curse of the Tree.
By Your burial You mortified the majesty of death.
You have enlightened our race by Your Resurrection.//
O Giver of life, Christ our God, glory to You!

O Christ, when You were seen nailed to the Cross,
You restored the beauty of Your creatures.
The soldiers showed their inhumanity when they pierced Your side with a spear.
The Hebrews not knowing Your power asked that Your tomb might be sealed,
but through the mercy of Your compassion,
You accepted the tomb and rose on the third day!//
O Lord, glory to You!

O Christ, the Giver of life,
for the sake of the dead You voluntarily endured death,
descending into hell as the Mighty One
to save those who awaited Your coming,
granting them the life of paradise instead of hell.
Grant also to us who glorify Your Resurrection on the third day//
cleansing of our sins and great mercy!

GLORY...NOW AND EVER... Triodion, tone 4:

The humble David
defeated his enemies by Your help, O Lord.
Now come to the aid of Your Orthodox people;
show us Your power as You did of old,
and our adversaries will know that You are God!
And we will be victorious, for we hope in You.
Through the constant intercessions of Your all-pure Mother,//
grant us Your great mercy!

TROPARIA

Resurrection, tone 2

When Thou didst descend to death, O Life Immortal,
Thou didst slay hell with the splendor of Thy Godhead!
And when from the depths Thou didst raise the dead,
All the powers of heaven cried out:
O Giver O Life! Christ our God! Glory to Thee!

Cross, tone 1

O Lord, save Your people,
and bless Your inheritance!
Grant victories to the Orthodox Christians
over their adversaries;
and by virtue of Your Cross,//
preserve Your habitation!

Resurrection Dismissal Theotokion, tone 1:

When Gabriel announced to you, O Virgin, saying “Rejoice!”
with that word the Master of all was incarnate in ^you,
the holy Ark, spoken of by the righteous David!
Your womb became more spacious than the heavens,
for you carried your Creator.
Glory to Him Who took abode in you!
Glory to Him Who came ^forth from you!//
Glory to Him Who freed us by being born of you!