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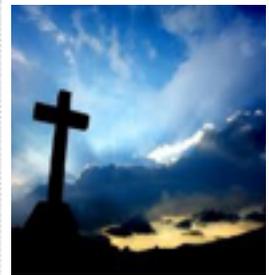
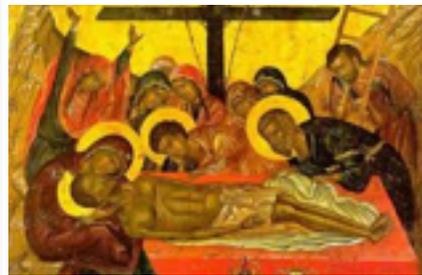
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The Cross of Christ and its meaning in our lives

By Archimandrite
Fr. George Kapsanis

The Honorable Cross as Symbol of and Sign of Christ

The honorable cross is the most holy sign and symbol of our faith. All the holy mysteries are ended with the calling of the Holy Spirit and the seal of the cross: baptism, Chrismation and Divine Eucharist. All the priest's blessing are with the sign of the cross. The sacred temples, sacred items and vestments are sanctified with the honorable cross. No liturgical act or gathering is imaginable without the cross. The cross is also the most faithful friend to every Orthodox Christian, from the moment we are born until the day we die. The grave of every Christian is marked with a cross. We make the sign of the cross often,



apartments, on in our cars, at our work places, and as the Church sings: *"The Cross is the guardian of the entire universe, the Cross is the beauty of the Church, the Cross is the might of kings, the Cross is support for the faithful, the Cross is the glory of angels and wound to the demons."* The cross is not only the holiest and dearest, but also an irreplaceable Christian symbol. Without it the Church of the Crucified Christ is unimaginable. This is why the heretics do not appropriately respect the honorable Cross. The Gerontikon says that Saint John asked the demons what they fear the most in the Christians, and they answered: "We fear three things: the thing you wear around your neck, the thing you with which you sprinkle yourselves in Church, and the thing you eat at Liturgy" Then he asked them again: "Which one of these do you fear the most?" And they said: "When you could maintain the good of what you eat at Liturgy, none of us would be able to harm a Christian" So, what the

demons fear the most is the cross, holy water and divine communion.

The Power of the Holy Cross

The grace and glory of the honorable cross are not in its shape, meaning by the fact that it is a cross, but its force is in the fact that it is Christ's cross, the means through which Christ saved the world.

It is the altar on which Christ offered Himself for the entire world. All the kenosis, denial, suffering, pain, death and all that he undertook for us, peaks in the cross. On the cross, He went through the greatest pain and humiliation for us. He became damnation for us, so that He would deliver us from the damnation of the sin and the law. The entire Christ's deed, all of His love for man is summed up in the cross. St. Gregory Palamas tells us how someone in irony asked one of the God-bearing fathers if he believed in the Crucified One, and he answered: yes I believe in the One who crucified sin. On the

Cross the God-Man resolved the tragedy of human freedom, which caused disobedience in the first created, and He was obedient to death, death on the cross." (Philipp. 2:8). So he has once again redirected our freedom towards our Creator, the Triune God. On the cross He trampled upon death the trampled upon death with death by making our death His, and with His resurrection he gave us life and everlastingness (incorruptibility). Through the cross He made us friends with God the Father and gave us dissolution of our sins. On the cross He demonstrated in the most convincing manner that He loves us endlessly, even when we crucify Him. Through the cross he led us to and united us in one body, us, His dispersed children; he demolished the impenetrable wall which divided us and "created a new man in Himself" (Eph. 2:15).

With the Cross he purified and sanctified the heavens, air an

earth since he was crucified under the heavens, lifted up in the air, and His most holy blood was spilled over the earth. On the cross he offered an encompassing sacrifice for the entire earth and for the general purification of the entire human nature. This is why he suffered outside of the city and outside of Solomon's temple, as is noted by St. John Chrysostom. With His crucifixion, "uplifted full of humility" as an ancient prayer says, he lifted up our nature which "thru false uplifting and vain movement descended to the Hades". On the cross He showed us that this world is not the ultimate reality, but only a road leading to the ultimate reality. Of course, if by bearing our cross we fight our egotism in this world. This is how he reestablished the positive meaning of this world.

On the cross he revealed Himself as the only Do-gooder and Savior, Deliverer and Life-giver of the universe, and ultimately he spoiled every deed of the devil, his methods and delusions, power and authority He had over people.

The death of the Lord on the cross is life-giving and delivering, it gives life and deliverance:

Because it is VOLUNTARY

The Lord approaches death not as a convict, but as a King who sacrifices Himself for His subjects, as He says: "But I have a baptism to undergo, and what constraint I am under until it is completed!" (Luke 12:50). This is why the Byzantines write on the cross: "The King of Glory", and paint Christ not overcome by pain (with a hung body that supports itself on the

spread out arms looking completely helpless), but the Lord over pain as well (the arms on the cross are horizontal).

Because DEATH is REAL

Based on His divinity unsuffering, the Lord suffered for us in His body. His human nature suffered through the pre mortal agony and pain of b e i n g crucified. He was to suffer through our death



completely not only phenomenologically. In the Gethsemane garden His human nature was really frightened, but it still obeyed the divine will and nature. This is how He suffered and died for salvation and life of the world. Because He was sinless SUFFERING for the sinners. It is a fundamental truth that the Lord was sinless because His human nature from the day of "Crucify the old man (that is, the passions) the body with all its passions and desires" (Galatians 5:24).

I reject the old man and battle to extract from myself the sinful and egotistical passions, my egotism and self-love. And forms of self-love are: small faith or disbelief; indifference towards our neighbors, or worse, using/abusing our neighbors; or worse, using/abusing our

greed and avarice; unforgiveness and slandering, and every deed with which we wound and sadden our neighbors; vainglory and vanity. According to the Holy Fathers, a self-loving man is incapable of loving neither God nor man. He can act as if he loves God or men, but he essentially loves only himself. If we do not crucify our self-love on Christ's cross we cannot be His true disciples, because we cannot get His true love. This is why His disciple, the Apostle Paul says: As for me, may I never boast about anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world." (Gal. 6, 14).

According to Saint Isaac the Syrian the world is our impassioned relationship towards creation, that is, our passions. Which means that the world is crucified to me and I am crucified to the world, which is to say that I avoid not only sin, but also sinful desires and sinful thoughts.

This eradicating can be achieved since we died and resurrected with Christ in the Holy Mysteries. "All of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death", so that "we too might walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:3-4).

In the dying life, through baptism we are given new life in Christ. Christian life after baptism is a struggle of the "possibility" to become "reality". The renewed and newly given life in Christ is to win and transform every detail of the dead and old man. This battle is a cross.

Interpreting this mystery, Saint Gregory Palamas speaks to us of our abandoning of the world (our first mystery of the cross). Then, when the world, through the bad thoughts tries to distance us from God, it is necessary to remove the world away from us (the second mystery of the cross). The first mystery corresponds to the practice and the second to

contemplation (self-observation).

Here, Saint Gregory mentions that without theory we cannot purify our inner man from the bad and impassioned thoughts: "When through practical virtue we reach theory, and improve and purify our inner man, and we seek within the hidden divine treasury, and we find the Kingdom of God, then we crucify ourselves for the world and for the passions. Because through this examination of the heart a warmth is born which suffocates the sneaky and impure thoughts life flies, brings peace and comfort to the soul, and sanctifies the body."

Saint Isaac the Syrian also says: "The action of the cross is two-fold... One is in the endurance of the bodily troubles and it is called praxis, and the other is in the subtle action of the mind, in the contemplation of God and the incessant prayer, and it is called theory."

According to Saint Gregory the cross acted in the Old



were performed with the sign of the cross, such as Moses' cross-shaped separation of the Red Sea. There are about twenty cases of the pre image of the Cross in the Old Testament. There were also some righteous men who were pre images of Christ the crucified, such as Isaac who was pre image of Christ in his obedience to his father. Then, there was Joseph who was unjustly banished and suffered through many temptations. In the end, all of the Old-Testament righteous men had the mystery of the cross acting for them both in practice and in theory, and this is the force with which they defeated sin and became God's friends. The cross acted in Abraham when he killed in himself his love for the fatherland and obeying God's command moved to an unknown land. The cross acted in Moses as well when he refused the honors of the pharaoh's court and chose suffering for his people. The cross also acted when God summoned Moses on Sinai and asked him to take the shoes off his feet, meaning,

to kill off all bodily wisdom through the power of seeing God.

And Saint Gregory concludes: "I lack the time to preach about Joshua (Jesus son of Neue) and the judges and prophets, King David and the others who acted through the mystery of the cross; they stopped rivers and the sun, the won wars, they opened and closed the sky, made the clouds rainy..." Ergo, "even before Christ's sacrifice on the cross the cross was the one that saved." Ergo, "even before Christ's sacrifice on the cross the cross was the one that saved." If the power of Christ's cross acted through all of the righteous men of the Old Testament, it is understandable that it acted through the Most Holy Virgin Mary who succeeded from the very beginning "to cast off from herself all that which does not please God". She never occupied her mind with unsure thoughts, and in her youth she did what Abraham did in his old age: she left her house and her relatives and entered the Holy of Holies where

she united her mind with God and remained in ceaseless contemplation of God.

Of course, the Cross in Theotokos' life was not the same as in the lives of the Old Testament righteous men who has part in sin. For them, the cross was a battle for overcoming sin, while for the Most Pure Theotokos it is ascending from power to power, from glory to glory, from theory to theory. "From the moment when she was born", says Saint Nicholas Cabasilas "she arranged the dwelling place for the One Who can save man, she worked on meticulously arrange God's dwelling place, that is, her own self so that she might be worthy of receiving Him. This cross-shaped struggle and theory seeing God which the Theotokos experienced in the Holy of Holies is spoken of in the homilies of Saint Gregory Palamas and Saint Nicodimos Agiorite for the feast of the "Presentation of the Most Holy Theotokos to the Temple".

b) I endure the unforeseen temptations in life patiently and without complaint.

Long and difficult illnesses, death of our beloved, as well as out approaching death, injustice, ungratefulness and neglect, the persecutions we sometimes endure, poverty and other temptations, are chances that, if we use them appropriately, crucify us and bring us closer to Christ. If we become indignant, we will be spiritually damaged. If we accept them passively, stoically, because we cannot do anything about it, we are yet again on a road to nowhere. If we, however, accept them as a visitation from God and as chances for our spiritual advancement, then we receive a great reward. The voluntary acceptance of the crucified suffering as a gift of divine love is to our spiritual advancement and elevates us to the heights of the holy martyrs.

One agiorite ascetics pointedly said: "One single praise "Praise to You God" at a time of illness has greater value that a

thousand "Lord Jesus Christ..." when we are healthy".

The crucified with Christ Apostle Paul convinces us: "If we endure we will reign with Him" (2. Tim. 2, 12). This position in life was demonstrated by all the saints led by the blessed and much-suffering Job, who is considered the pre-image of Christ.

Job was just, he was not godless or sinful, and yet God allowed him to suffer through unbearable pains, while other godless men prospered. The renown orthodox theologian father Demetrium Staniloae, speaking on this subject teaches us: "God has the right to give or take gifts. And man should not approach God because God has given him something. Such an attitude towards God would not be an expression of true love, but only a dedication because of the gifts themselves. It would mean placing the gifts before the Gift Giver. The relationship between God and man would, in that case, be based on a principle of

"I will be as dedicated to you depending on how much I am given." Such an attitude would mean that God by Himself is not worthy of love. Then, this relationship would depend on having interest, that is, man only uses the gifts given by God. It would mean that in essence man would only love his own self. With this approach, the gifts, as signs of God's love and as means of man's entering into a personal relationship with God, would lose their meaning. Gifts have meaning only when we enter a truly personal relationship with God, a relationship that surpasses everything materialistic.

Only such a relationship would not get burdened with materialistic idols. All our ideas about things and gifts given by God disappear in the light of such a relationship. Thus purified we offer ourselves to God and we rise up to a loving dialogue with Him. This is when we feel that God is immensely greater than all His gifts and all that is created. With this relationship we are risen to a

different plane of existence and we receive back everything that we have lost. The Christian who has within God's love for everyone a love that makes an under caring and in exhaustive reality feels the greatest of all joys. Greater than all the things in this world can offer him, greater than his own existence. This is a fact that virtuous men feel in their suffering.

This Cross is given to men so that they could reveal God in a different plane of existence, in an apophatic depth. But also, to show others that there are those who can remain united with God even they lose all that they have, even when it seems that God Himself slips away from them. In a particular way Theotokos participated in Christ suffering. "Theotokos participated and suffered together contributing to the exalting kenosis of God the Logos" (Saint Gregory Palamas). Ever since the Holy Spirit conceived the Logos in her womb her temptations began. Joseph, unable to explain her inexplicable

conception and pregnancy "planned to send her away secretly" (Matthew. 1:19). The pain of the simple hearted Virgin Mary must have been great at that time.

There were temptations and difficulty when she sought place to give birth as well, since it is rare that a woman ready to give birth is unable to find a place to give birth. Herod's killing of the children was another temptation. The escape to Egypt was. Without a roof over their head in Betlehem, a fugitive in Egypt. The temptations and agony during the pilgrimage to Jerusalem when she lost her twelve-year old son. Every pain Jesus suffered during his three-year long activity was her temptation.

Let us hear St. Nicholas Cabasilas: "And together with her Son she suffered the humiliation and insults. And when those to whom He did good killed Him, she suffered with Him all His pains. She partook in everything her Son did for our salvation.

She gave Him her blood and body, she participated in His sufferings and joys. And when the spear pierced Him on the cross she felt as though she herself was pierced with a knife, as was foreseen by St. Simeon. After the Ascension of her Son yet again we see her as first among the apostles and Christians.

c) I undertake voluntary efforts and self-denials for the love of God.

The Lord Himself taught us that the path of the gospel is narrow and hard, and that the Kingdom of God is received by those who strive. Without strife and work over our selves the old man will not step down, the passions will not be uprooted.

With fasting, prayer, vigils, prostrations and a full orthodox askesis the passions are removed and the Christian becomes spiritual instead of carnal. He endeavors not to approach people and material goods in an impassioned way. He strives not as an animal, but as an icon of God. He tries not

to use the world as a consumer, but in the manner of the Eucharist (thanksgiving). There is a saying by the holy fathers of the Church: "Give blood receive spirit". The Great Lent is very arduous, but without this effort crucifying ourselves with Christ we cannot experience the joy of the Resurrection. In our Orthodox Church, where we strive by bearing our cross, we can experience the Resurrection. In our Church everything is in the spirit of the resurrection, because everything is done through bearing the cross. Our Church is a Church of the cross and of the resurrection. Without a cross, there is no resurrection. And the cross does not exist as a cross if it is not followed by a resurrection. This is why, we the Orthodox celebrate Good Friday in the spirit of the resurrection, while in the West (the Roman-Catholics) celebrate even Easter in the sign of the cross. "Before Thy Cross, we bow down in worship Master and Thy Holy Resurrection we glorify."

St. John Chrysostom begins the

"Homily on the Cross" with the following words: "Today we celebrate and rejoice, because our Lord is nailed to the cross... the Cross is the foundation of our salvation, the cross is the source of innumerable good deeds."

In the effort and strife of the cross-bearing life is the most mysterious and most true joy and tranquility, just as the Lord Himself proclaimed: "Blessed are those who cry for they will be comforted". Tears of temptation and effort are, according to the holy fathers, a joyful sorrow.

The life of our Theotokos was ascetic as well, especially, as we previously mentioned in the holy of holies. But even after her Son's ascension to heaven, according to Saint Gregory the Palamas, she lived a life which can be compared with the most stern of askesis. The holy apostles were taught the cross-bearing askesis from our Savior and from the Theotokos, and related this teaching to the church.

Our people learned and created

the Cross-Resurrecting ethos from the Church. This ethos helped endure the 400-year-long slavery under the Turks. This ethos contributed so that this feeble people gets courage and have an uprising in 1821. The simple and illiterate mothers, made wise by God, taught their children to their faith, to prayer, fasting and repentance. They brought up truly free people to become leaders in the fight for national freedom. Let us reflect on the education we offer our children today and how much we help them to become truly free people? Today we see the advertising and promotion of other types of askesis, unorthodox and unchristian. The gospel and the orthodox askesis has nothing to do with the ascetic methods of various eastern, hindu teachings of the yoga type, where askesis has an anthropocentric character and is merely gymnastics of the will and not being crucified together with Christ. In the Orthodox Church askesis is never a goal on its own, peaking in self-justification. But it is always means to obtaining the grace of the Holy Spirit and true love toward God and man. For the Orthodox Christians accepting the cross is an expression of humility and love towards God. It is a gift back to God for sacrificing Himself for us. Suffering for Christ may be offered before God and before the Church, as is the case with the Holy Apostle Paul: "Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body, which is the church..." (Colos. 1:24) In the sufferings of many martyrs (Saint Charalambos, Saint Modestus, Saint Anastasia the Roman) we can see that they offer to God their pain and

death for all those distressed people who call them in their prayers. It is an example of perfect love, because the sufferings here take place not only for personal salvation, but also for the salvation of others.

The Cross and our contemporary world

We live in a world full of the spirit of enmity towards the cross. In



a world that self-lovingly, has set the ideal of satisfying one's own passions without any moral, the easy life and comfort, which invested its freedom not in the sacrifice and love (i.e. in the Cross) but in the egotism.

This world does not want to hear anything of self-denial, of governing over one's own passions, of sacrificing, of fasting, of askesis. Essentially, the cross is rejected and this is why there is no encounter with Christ. One remains in decay and death, in boredom and emptiness. They have fun, but they do not rejoice.

Psychology, pedagogy, politics, sociology, lawyer directly attacked with this spirit. It is very well noted in father Dimitri Dudko's book "Our Hope": "it is obvious that sometimes despite our faith in Christ we try to make our voyage towards the

with all of its goods and technical progress has made us numb. Although we sometimes speak of pain and suffering, it so happens that we say all of a sudden "Christianity is joy". However, joy does not come just like that. Joy cannot be bought. It cannot be bought with money. The joy of the Christian is bought with effort and suffering. In order for man to be saved, our Lord hung on the cross. Voluntarily. He was crucified and He died. And then came the resurrection and afterwards the joy. "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me", said Christ. It is necessary to take one's own cross. Those who follow Christ without a Cross are not worthy of Christ. Christ Himself told us this very clearly: "He is not worthy of me." It means that: "the faith and love of such a person towards Christ are not genuine, they are worthless".

The cross terrifies us, and this is natural, because it robs us of our comfort. Pain is a scary thing to us, and in fact it is comfort which should be the scary one. If we carefully

inspect we can notice that all contemporary evils have their source in comfort. Strife, suffering, and the cross are what is good, says Christ. This is the only way in which His burden becomes light. "This world which rejects Christ's cross must face the merciless blows which have arisen as consequence to its anti-Cross views; AIDS, drug addictions, ecological disasters. And the solution is not where it is thought, that is, in the undertaking of certain protective measures. Those are useful, but they are not sufficient. The only far-reaching solution is repentance. The Jews asked for a "sign" from Christ and He answered that the only sign that will be given to them is the sign of the prophet Jonas. By this implying His death, burial and resurrection (Mat. 12:39). Today this is the solution to our hopelessness and the looming disaster. So, the choice of the cross-bearing life is the only sort of life.

One of the western fathers, the blessed Augustine, said: "I know

of three crosses. One is the cross of salvation, Christ's Cross. This is the cross by which man is saved. The other cross is the cross of the thief, crucified on the right side. And, there is a third cross, by which man can lose eternity. This is the cross of the thief crucified on the left side. These two persons, the two thieves, represent the entire humanity. The Cross of the thief on the right side accepts and assumes Christ's cross. The cross of the thief on the left side is the part of humanity that does not accept Christ's cross, and thus ends up on the losing side. And in general, the cross cannot be avoided in any way." The Christians who live in this world, who cast off the cross, must make great efforts not to dive into the world of materialistic values. They are in a perpetual dilemma between two ways of life: the cross-bearing life in Christ or the anti-cross life, that is, the crucified love and the anti-cross egotism. With love we become crucified with Christ,

and with egotism we crucify Christ, we become enemies of Christ's Cross. The old and new crucifiers of Christ are mentioned by the Apostle Paul: "*For, as I have often told you before and now tell you again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things.*" (Phil. 3:18-19).

The devil tries to frighten Christians that if they choose the Cross they will be backwards, they will not progress, they will not prevail with a cross in your hand you do not progress that they will be become victims of abuse, and then he suggests that they abuse others (so that they would prevent being abused).

So, having so very little faith, they neglect the grace, power and protection of God over all who fulfill His commandments.

The Jews wanted a Messiah but without a Cross. And today, people want paradise, but without a Cross. This is why they call us Christians to abandon the cross-bearing life.

If the Antichrist wars against Christ, he does so because Christ is the crucified Christ, which also implies the resurrected Christ. As a false messiah and false prophet, the Antichrist promises people an earthy paradise, deliverance and salvation without a cross.

But how can there be paradise without love and love without self-denial. The rise against egotism is the most radical uprising in the world. There is an interesting interpretation to the symbolism of the number of the Antichrist 666. In Greek this number is written (HXSt) "*Christ alien to the Cross*".

This would be interpreted as a savior without a cross, meaning an Antichrist.



Let us ask today the Grace of the Crucified and Risen Lord, to not get caught by the Antichrist.

To not refuse His Cross, our Cross, the love, the spirit of sacrifice and offer, the humility, the patience in suffering, the abstemiousness, the asceticism.

Especially the times when our selfishness tends to dominate us, let us contemplate our Crucified Lord, like the poisoned Jews the snake in the desert.

Let us crucify onto His Cross every our selfish desire, every sinful passion, every impatience, every rage and anger, every absence of faith.

repent, let us come back to the life of Cross.

Let us ask help from Our Panagia, who not only did not prevent her only begotten Son from the Cross, but she lived her own Cross-bearing life and discreetly helped her Son to lift His Cross.

Now, she helps us to lift of our own Cross, which leads to

Resurrection. Our Church with wisdom leads us to the life of Crucifixion and Resurrection.

The crowd of the Saints of our Church, are crowd who crucified and resurrected with Christ, which around the Slaughtered Lamb, together with our Panagia, chant a new ode (song). It is the eternal Pascha.

In an Easter like this, Christ invite us with His Cross.

Translated By:
The Serbian Orthodox Church in
Lebanon, PA

Paracletos Greek Orthodox Monastery
790 Gin House rd
Abbeville, SC 29620

Ph: 864-348-7545

Web site: www.greekorthodoxmonastery.org

