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Archbishop Elpidophoros of America, Homily on the Sunday of the Veneration of the Holy Cross



Homily on the Sunday of the Veneration of the Holy Cross

Saints Constantine and Helen Greek Orthodox Church

Roseland, New Jersey

April 4, 2021

Beloved Faithful of this wonderful Parish,

Today, the Sunday of the Veneration of the Holy and Life-Giving Cross, marks the midpoint in our journey together to Pascha.

Today, the Church brings forth the Cross and offers it to us as a Staff upon which we may always lean and find comfort, as the Psalmist sings:

Ἡ ῥάβδος σου καὶ ἡ βακτηρία σου αὐταὶ με παρεκάλεσαν.

“Your rod and your staff, they comfort me.”

Today, we chanted praises to the Cross in the Canon of the Day, but the melody

was the same as the Resurrection Canon on Pascha. And why is this, you may ask? It is because we know that we can only attain the Resurrection of the Lord, if we pass through the Cross and His Death with Him.

Therefore, today we bow deeply before the Cross, because the Lord was hung upon it between Heaven and earth – suspended, so that He could undo the “prince of the power of the air.” And so that He might take an instrument of torture and death, and transform it into a sign of everlasting life – thereby making it our bridge, from the depths of the earth to the heights of Heaven.

My beloved Christians,

This Sunday of the Veneration of the Holy Cross is our way station, where we are refreshed. And this refreshment is embodied in the blossoms and flowers that we share at the conclusion of the Liturgy.

I want you to think of the difference that the Resurrection of our Lord makes to this universally recognized symbol.

If you were alive two thousand years ago, and you saw a cross on the road, you would have shuddered with fear and horror. Because, for the Romans, crucifixion was more than a way of administering the death penalty.

It was a way of punishing everyone who would see the poor person nailed to a cross. It was designed to humiliate, degrade, expose and, ultimately, torture to death a particular kind of criminal – one who opposed the might of Rome.

Seventy years before our Lord was born, the Romans crucified over five thousand slaves who revolted against their condition, and who were led by the famous Spartacus.

Rome had to wait until Saint Constantine – the first Christian Emperor to become its sole ruler in the early Fourth Century – for this barbaric practice to be outlawed.

Our Lord Jesus Christ was crucified to make an example of Him. This is why Pontius Pilate nailed an accusation above His Sacred Head in three languages – Hebrew, Latin and Greek: “Jesus the Nazarene, King of the Jews.”

But, my dear Faithful,

We know that the Lord Jesus is the King of Glory – ὁ Βασιλεὺς τῆς Δόξης – Who destroyed death by His Death on the Cross.

He is the King of Glory, the Lord of Hosts, who despoiled and burst apart the gates of Hell, because they could never prevail against the Church.

And by destroying death by His own death upon the Cross, the Lord has transformed this instrument of torture and death into a sign of Love, a sign of Liberty, and a sign of Eternal Life.

This is why we no longer fear the Cross; this is why we make the sign of the Cross; this is why we wear the Cross; and this is why we bow down before the Holy Cross.

Because, for all the pain and suffering, the Lord transfigured an instrument to take one's soul to Hadēs, and He made of it the bridge by which we are transported to Heaven.

He suffered with us. He died for us. And he arose from the dead to give us life everlasting.

Therefore, beloved Christians:

Let the Cross be the Pillar that establishes your every action, thought, intention and motivation.

Let the Cross be your Signpost that guides and directs your orientation throughout your lives.

Let the Cross be the Stake upon which you nurture and increase the fruits of your labors in the Vineyard of the Lord – His Holy Church.

Let the Cross be the Mast, upon which you unveil the sails of your existence, to bear you safely into port.

And let the Cross be the Bridge, by which one day you will pass over from earth to Heaven, and from life to death.

Thus shall we find ourselves arriving at the Holy Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, and at His bright and glorious Pascha. Amen.

