



PARISH INFORMATION BULLETIN

PROGRAM FOR 31 MARCH—6 APRIL 2019

SUNDAY 31 MARCH	3rd Sunday of Lent, The Veneration of the Holy Cross, Mark 8: 34-38, 9:1 <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 7.30– 11.00am Orthros and Divine Liturgy
• SUNDAY SCHOOL CLASSES FOR ALL AGES (A free voluntary program organised by the Church) Lessons take place in the building behind the church and begin at the time of Holy Communion until Church dismissal. We have classes for ages ranging from 5yrs to teenage years. Lessons are taught in a relaxed, friendly environment. Please bring your children along to learn of their rich Orthodox faith and come close to God and His Love.	
MONDAY 1 APRIL	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 10.00am Meeting of Elderly Citizens in Church Hall.• 5.00pm Service of Great Compline
TUESDAY 2 APRIL	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 5.00pm Service of Great Compline• 7.00pm Parishes of St Vasilios and the Presentation of our Lord Youth Group will meet in Coburg Church Hall.
WEDNESDAY 3 APRIL	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 8.00– 9.30am Service of Presanctified Liturgy• 5.00pm Service of Great Compline
THURSDAY 4 APRIL	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 5.00pm Service of Great Compline• 7.30—8.30pm TEENAGE YOUTH GROUP (Ages 13-19) – In Church Hall, upstairs behind the Church ALL TEENAGERS WELCOME.
FRIDAY 5 APRIL	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 6.00pm Service of Akathist Hymn to The Theotokos— Fourth Salutations to the Theotokos
SATURDAY 6 APRIL	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 3.45pm Service of Vespers
SUNDAY 7 APRIL	GOSPEL READING: Mark 9: 17-31 EPISTLE READING: Hebrews 6: 13-20



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Fr Athanasios and
Fr Ephraim
are available at the Church
every Monday to Friday
between 4.00 and 6.00pm
for Holy Confession and
any spiritual need.

The sign of
sincere love is to
forgive wrongs
done to us.

It was with such
love that the Lord
loved the world.



St. Mark the Ascetic

On the Third Sunday of Great and Holy Lent, the Orthodox Church commemorates the Precious and Life-Giving Cross of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Services include a special veneration of the Cross, which prepares the faithful for the commemoration of the Crucifixion during Holy Week.

What shall we offer you O Christ?

For You have given us Your precious Cross to venerate,

on which Your holy Blood was shed,

to which Your flesh was fixed by nails.

With love we kiss it and give thanks to You.

Orthros—Sunday of the Holy Cross

3rd Sunday of Lent, The Veneration of the Holy Cross, Mark 8: 34-38, 9:1

True Crosses

How many of us would say that today, or yesterday or this past week, we have suffered in some form or another, that we've had a bad day or a difficult moment in which we felt pain and despair? And when we felt this way did we ask: why me, why now or just why? And where was this question directed: towards another person, towards myself or towards God? Where did we try and find relief from suffering: in some form of escape, by talking with a friend or a priest, in prayer, in the scriptures?

A lot of help and answers to these questions can be found in today's gospel reading (Mark 8:34-9:1). In this passage, Jesus states '*Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me*' (v.34). When He says 'take up his cross', what does Jesus mean by 'cross'? Well, some people think that 'cross' here means 'any particular suffering' or 'when things don't go our way.' For example, one might say 'I lost money in the stock market but that's my cross to bear.' However, this is not what Jesus is talking about because not all suffering in this life is suffering for God's sake. Often the suffering we experience is because of our own actions. Earlier in the Gospel of Mark Jesus said, '*For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders* ²² *thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness.* ²³ *All these evil things come from within and defile a man.*' (7:21). In Galatians 5, St. Paul takes up the same theme saying, ¹⁹ *Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery,* ²⁰ *idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies,* ²¹ *envy, murders,* ²² *drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God*' (Gal.5:19-21). Have we ever considered that our suffering could be coming from one or more of the behaviors just mentioned?

However, if our suffering is not a result of our own sin, but a suffering given or allowed by God, what might that look like? Well, there are three types of suffering. The first type results from persecution of body and soul by other people. Secondly, there is suffering as a result of sickness and disease. And third, people suffer in spirit because of the sins of the world. We could include in the third type the suffering that occurs when a loved one dies, what we commonly call 'grief'. With all these types of suffering, there are only two responses: The first response is humble acceptance and transformation towards salvation for one's self and for others. This is what Jesus means when He says 'take up our cross.' In other words, Jesus is telling us to humbly accept our suffering and let it transform us so that it may become the way or the means of our salvation in Him and perhaps even the way of salvation for other people.

The second possible response is trying to defeat our cross by rebelling against it and rejecting it. This seems to be the predominant message within our society today when dealing with suffering. This message says expend as much energy as possible towards creating comfort and luxury in order to prevent and avoid suffering. If you see suffering coming your way, turn around and run away as fast as you can.

For those who suffer, whether from persecution, from illness or from grieving, if we do this by the virtue of God, we will receive sufficient grace from God to be strong in the Lord. God's grace will enable us to take up our cross--to be crucified--for God's glory and not for our spiritual death. In other words, when we suffer, we should suffer with the hope that Christ will help us get through it (not around it or away from it), with the hope that we will learn from it, with the hope that we will become better persons because of it, and with the ultimate hope that we will grow closer to Him in the midst of it.

If we see that our suffering is separating us from God, then it is because we brought it on by our own sins or we are not taking up our cross and following Christ. Christ suffered on the cross for our sake. He took on all the sin of the world so that we would not be enslaved by sin and death anymore. Yet, even if our suffering has been self-imposed through our own sinful actions, when we repent of them and take responsibility for the consequences, resolving to make restitution as best we can when appropriate, then this suffering can become a true cross.

The most difficult suffering of all is not in the flesh but rather in the spirit. It happens in the soul of the spiritual person when he/she sees the utter futility, ugliness and pettiness of sin that damages and destroys persons made in the image of God. It is the pain we feel when we see people persecuting each other by gossip, slander, selfishness and abuse. It is the hurt we feel when we see each other suffering in sickness, illness and disease. It is the grief we feel when we see someone die and how it affects their surviving friends and family. When we witness and experience all these things, we suffer because we realize this is not the world, nor the life that God created. It is a world, a life, that has become infected by sin and fallen from grace. Yet, even in the midst of this ugliness and disfigurement, Christ is with us. He never abandons us

When Christ says, 'if you want to come after me, you must first deny yourself,' He means that we must deny sin and temptation in our life. We cannot grow closer to Christ while continuing to give in to unhealthy and self-serving behaviours. We can grow closer to Him through self-control which is strengthened by practicing asceticism in prayer, fasting, almsgiving and worship, the pillars of Orthodox spirituality.

And finally, when Christ says, '*take up your cross and follow Me,*' He means to take whatever suffering comes our way and bear it with meaning and hope, following Him wherever He leads us. Denying ourselves and taking up our cross in this manner, this is what Jesus means when He says, '*Whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it*' (v.35). Denying, running away from or rejecting our suffering will not save our life, but rather cause us to lose it (v.35). Let us lose our life for Christ and the Good News understanding what the true crosses are in our life, and how they can help us grow closer to God.

Amen! Fr. Richard Demetrius Andrews, Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America