



Parish Information Bulletin

Program for 12—18 September 2021

SUNDAY 12 SEPTEMBER

SUNDAY BEFORE HOLY CROSS, John 3: 13-17

- 8.00am—Orthros and Divine Liturgy

TUESDAY 14 SEPTEMBER

EXALTATION OF THE HOLY CROSS

(Strict Fast)

- 8.00am—Orthros and Divine Liturgy

FRIDAY 17 SEPTEMBER

*Martyrs Saints Sophia,
Pistis, Elpis and Agape*

- 8.00am—Orthros and Divine Liturgy

2021 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 10.30am 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.

SUNDAY 19 SEPTEMBER

GOSPEL READING: Mark 8: 34-38, 9:1

EPISTLE READING: Galatians 2: 16-20

Telephone Contact Numbers

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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 POWER OF THE CROSS

The mysterious power of the Cross, however inexplicable, is true and indisputable. St John Chrysostom speaks of the custom that obtained in his time, of placing the sign of the Cross 'on the imperial diadem and the soldiers' accoutrements, and of making it on parts of the body: the head, the breast and the heart, both at the table of sacrifice and on lying down in bed.' 'If', he says, 'we are striving to drive out demons, we use the Cross, and it is also of aid in healing sickness.' St Benedict made the sign of the Cross over a glass containing poison, and the glass shattered as if struck by a stone. St Julian made the sign of the Cross over a cup of poison brought to him, and drank the poison, suffering no bodily harm from it. The holy martyr Vasilissa of Nicomedia protected herself with the sign of the Cross and stood in the midst of the flames, remaining completely untouched. The holy martyrs Audon and Senis crossed themselves when ravening wild animals were let loose on them, and the beasts became docile and meek as lambs. The sign of the Cross has been the most powerful weapon against great temptations from demons, from the early ascetics down to the present day.

The most ferocious of the devil's devisings are dispersed into nothing, like smoke, when a man signs himself with the Cross. Thus it was the good will of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself that the erstwhile sign of wickedness and shame, the cross, should, after His crucifixion on the wood of the cross, be the vehicle of all-conquering power and might.

- St Nikolai Velimerovic, *The Prologue from Ochrid*

SUNDAY BEFORE HOLY CROSS, John 3: 13-17

Today, on this Sunday before the feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, the Lord presents the central theme of the Gospel in a few words: God saves the world from the devil and sin driven by endless love alone!

To help in understanding, Jesus uses as an example a miracle which occurred while the Israelites were in the desert (Numbers 21:9). The people had been freed from slavery to the Egyptians by God's miraculous interventions. Yet, the Israelites often forgot the true God, who poured down upon them heavenly food every day, and worshiped the idols. God, to again bring them close to Him, allowed poisonous snakes to bite them, causing many to die. Moses turned to God with tears, and begged for the salvation of his people from this calamity. God replied: Make a snake statue made of copper, and put it on a high pole- so a cross would be formed- and those who were bitten by the snakes can look at it and be saved. So it happened. This is exactly what happened in the salvation of the whole world and the human race: Jesus accepted being nailed on the Cross, so that those who are poisoned by the devil (the ancient serpent) can turn to Him in faith and be saved.

Indeed, we should realize the extent of the sacrifice of the Son of God, Jesus Christ for us! Why should He be sacrificed? Did we deserve it? The Holy Gospels are full of the hostile actions of the people and Jews against Jesus. Often "Jews took up stones to throw at Him" (John 8:59). They slandered Him as a friend of the sinners and unjust customs. They accused Him of not keeping the commandments of God! They came to the point of claiming that Jesus did miracles with the power of the devil and often sought to have him killed. And Jesus, in spite of all this, is going to be crucified for these people and for all of us! The Apostle Paul, amazed at this greatness of God the Father, exclaims: "While we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8). While the people were still enemies of Christ, Christ died for us! Something like this had never happened! History has written of times when someone would offer to give his life to save his friend, but we had never heard of a man who died to save his enemy. Only Christ was sacrificed for all, friends and foes.

Why does God the Father decide to sacrifice His only-begotten Son, and Christ accepts suffering this sacrifice? The Lord Himself gave us the original answer in today's Gospel: 'God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life' (verse 16).

But we must remember something important that the Lord points out. The Son of God died for the salvation of all, but not everyone is saved! As in the Sinai desert, those who faithfully looked upon the copper serpent on the wood were saved, so also those who with faith look towards Jesus Christ hanging on the Cross are saved. The Lord emphasized: "... whoever believes in the Son of God....have everlasting life."

My brothers and sisters, what happiness there is, if we could feel deep within us this infinite love Christ has for us! If we constantly and faithfully turn our soul's gaze to Christ. If our life was such that we could say along with the Apostle Paul, "the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, Who loved me and gave Himself for me" (Galatians 2:20).

- Metropolitan of Pisidia Sotirios Source: pemptousia.com



In today's Epistle (Galatians 6:11-16), we hear the words: "*what counts is a new creation.*" That is what we are trying to do. We come to church and see the icons, these are people, scenes and events transfigured by God into holy events and holy people. We come here and experience bread and wine transfigured into the Body and Blood of Christ. We come here as individuals and are transformed by the Holy Spirit into the Body of Christ, God's own church.

What we experience here, we can do in our own homes and lives as God's priests. We can transfigure and transform every moment into an iconic moment. The icons shouldn't just be on the walls of the church, we can make our lives iconic. In fact we are each an icon of God – we each are created in God's image (icon) [Genesis 1:26-27]. When we live as Christians, when we live in God's likeness, we make each moment and each event iconic because we make God's image present in us.

"For God so loved the world..." (John 3 – today's Gospel) –

Fr. Schmemmann points out it is this world God loves. It is this life God loves. No other.

This world and this life are to be communion with God. God offers this to us, but we can also strive to make it so.

It is this world where there are hurricanes, and earthquakes and war and political strife and financial struggle – this is

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the very world into which Christ became incarnate. He chose to enter into this world because of His love for us. There is something about this world which God loves and is not willing to give up on. He wants to transform this world, not replace it with some other world.

God loves this world
God wishes to save this world
God can transfigure this world.

Even with all the problems of this world – natural disasters, human made disasters, sin, evil, human hubris, God still loves this world because He sees the goodness in it and He still sees His image in us! God has entered into this world and share our human nature because God loves us and this world.

We can cooperate with God by being God's priests and transforming our lives and what we do into a daily spiritual offering to God. We can make ourselves image bearers of God and can make our lives, our homes, our time on earth to be iconic and to reveal the presence of God to everyone.

God's Love

John 3:16-17

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him.

St. Irenaeus of Lyons (d. 202AD) writes:

"God created Adam in the beginning, not because he needs the human race, but so that he might have a recipient of his generosity. Moreover, God commanded us to follow Christ, not because He has any need of our service, but because He wants to give us salvation. To follow the Saviour is to share in salvation, just as to follow the light is to gain the light. People who are in the light do not themselves provide the light but are illuminated and made bright by it; they do not contribute anything to it but, by being illuminated, they receive the benefit of the light. Similarly, to serve God does not mean giving him any gift, nor has God any need of our service. On the contrary, it is He who gives to those who serve Him life, immortality and eternal glory. He rewards those who serve him without deriving any benefit Himself from their service: He is rich, He is perfect, He has no needs. God requests human obedience so that His love and His pity may have an opportunity of doing good to those who serve Him diligently. The less God has need of anything, the more human beings need to be united with Him. Consequently, a human being's true glory is to persevere in the service of God."

(Drinking from the Hidden Fountain, p 27)



What is the later history of the Cross of Christ and where is it now found?

In the year 614 the Persian King (Shah) Khosroes captured Jerusalem and along with other treasures abducted the Tree of the Cross. After 15 years when the Persians were defeated, the Cross was returned. At the triumphant meeting of the returned Cross the Emperor Heraclius, himself decided to bear this treasure from the Mount of Olives to the Church of the Resurrection. At the gates of Golgotha, however, some invisible force stopped him and the more he tried the stronger was the power that held him back. Then it was revealed to the Patriarch in a vision that it was not right for the Emperor to go in such majesty and brilliance where the Saviour Himself, carrying His own Cross, went in such poverty and humiliation. The next day, having divested himself of his footwear and extravagant raiment, dressed in simple clothing, the Emperor took the Cross upon his own back and without any hindrance carried it to the Church. This was 14 September of the year 629. Later this Cross was taken apart in particles by the Faithful and today there is not, it would seem, any country where particles of this most precious sacred object is not preserved in churches and even by individuals.



"Glory, O Lord, to the power of Thy Cross, which never fails! When the enemy oppresses me with a sinful thought or feeling, and I, lacking freedom in my heart, make the sign of the Cross several times with faith, suddenly my sin falls away from me, the compulsion vanishes, and I find myself free... For the faithful the Cross is a mighty power which delivers from all evils, from the malice of the invisible foe."