



## Parish Information Bulletin

### Program for 19—25 September 2021

#### SUNDAY 19 SEPTEMBER

#### SUNDAY AFTER HOLY CROSS, Mark 8: 34-38, 9:1

- 8.00am—Orthros and Divine Liturgy

#### MONDAY 20 SEPTEMBER Great-Martyrs St Eustathios and His Companions

- 8.00am—Orthros and Divine Liturgy

#### FRIDAY 24 SEPTEMBER Our Lady of Myrtles

- 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 26 SEPTEMBER

#### GOSPEL READING: John 19: 25-27, 21: 24-25

#### EPISTLE READING: 1 John 4: 12-19

### 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 one who knows God will follow the Lord's footsteps, bearing the cross of the Saviour.

It is said, "The world is crucified to him and he to the world."

The Lord says, "He who loses his life will save it."

We can "lose our lives" in one of two ways. First, we can risk our lives just as the Lord did for us.

Secondly, we can separate our lives from the customary things of this world.

Bearing the cross means to separate our souls from the delights and pleasures of this life.

If you do this, you will find your life again - resting in the hope of what is to come.

Dying to ourselves means being content with the necessities of life.

When we want more than these necessities it is easy to sin."

- St. Clement of Alexandria in *The One Who knows God*

### SUNDAY AFTER HOLY CROSS, Mark 8: 34-38, 9:1

#### The Idolatry of Not Taking Up Our Crosses: Homily for the Sunday After the Elevation of the Holy Cross and The Great Martyr Eustathios in the Orthodox Church

Galatians 2:16-20; Mark 8:34-9:1

As we continue to celebrate the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, we do something that would have made no sense to anyone at the time of our Lord's ministry in first-century Palestine. The cross was then simply the most feared instrument of execution that the Roman Empire used to discourage anyone who thought of rebelling against the military occupation of their homeland. Our Lord's disciples, along with the rest of the Jews, certainly did not expect a Messiah Who would suffer such a dishonourable fate. They wanted a new King David to liberate their land from the pagans and to bring power and glory to their nation. They wanted a deliverer to gain the whole world on their behalf, but who would have been unable to heal their souls.

We sometimes forget that the Saviour was tempted before His public ministry began to gain all the kingdoms of the world by worshipping the devil. (Lk. 4:5-8) Right before today's gospel reading, when Peter attempted to correct Christ when He foretold His crucifixion, the Lord said, "Get behind me, Satan!" These passages make clear that for Him to have refused the Cross for the sake of earthly power and glory would have been a complete rejection of His divine will and ministry. Instead of embracing evil in order to acquire worldly dominance, the Saviour freely took upon Himself the full force of the death-dealing powers of this world. By rising triumphantly over them in His glorious resurrection on the third day, He demonstrated the infinite superiority of the Kingdom of Heaven to those who rule upon the earth.

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The Romans worshipped many different gods, including their own emperors, because they believed that they secured Rome's power. Is it at all surprising that such an idolatrous empire would kill the God-Man and attempt to make His death a public example of what would happen to anyone perceived as a threat to their rule? Those enslaved to idolatrous pride cannot tolerate the worship of the one true God and will do everything in their power to lash out at Him and those who serve Him instead. A few decades after our Lord's resurrection, the Romans began persecuting Christians because they refused to worship the idols believed to protect the Empire.

Tomorrow we commemorate the Great Martyr Eustathios and his family, who became martyrs for Christ when they were put into a red-hot bronze bull. He had been a famous Roman general, but became a Christian after seeing the Lord's Cross in the antlers of a great deer while hunting. After he and his family were baptized, great sufferings beset his entire family. After receiving honours for a military victory, Eustathios refused the emperor's command to sacrifice to the false gods, saying, "I am a Christian and I glorify and give thanks to Christ, and I offer sacrifice to Him. I owe my life to Him. I do not know or believe in any other God." He and his family made the ultimate witness for the Saviour in the year 126.

The Great Martyr Eustathios and his family obeyed the Lord's teaching in today's gospel reading: "If any man would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for My sake and the Gospel's will save it." The famous Roman general could have easily kept everything someone could want in life by engaging in the required pagan rituals. He had the spiritual clarity, however, to see that to do so would have been to reject the Lord Who offered up Himself for the salvation of the world on the Cross. The Saviour had called Him through His Cross, and Eustathios knew that He had made even public execution a pathway to a Kingdom that transcends earthly realms which sustain themselves through the fear of death, which is the wages of sin.

We must not be so naïve as to think that great empires and nations, of whatever century, reign merely by truth and righteousness. Where is more blood shed in sacrifices to the false gods of this world than in war? Where are the disordered desires of the souls of fallen humanity revealed more clearly than in organized efforts to repeat the tragedy of Cain and Abel on a mass scale? Regardless of the circumstances, the closer people get to bloodshed, the more depravity and brokenness they risk welcoming into their own hearts. That reality makes the witness of Saint Eustathios all the more brilliant, for Roman soldiers were certainly familiar with wallowing in blood.

No matter how necessary realms sustained by the use of force may be in the world as we know it, they will never conquer the grave or fulfil those who bear the image and likeness of God. They are not our salvation. That is surely part of the reason why we pray in every Divine Liturgy "for our armed forces that we, in their tranquillity, may lead a calm and peaceful life in all reverence and godliness." We pray for their and our peace and salvation, and for the same blessings for all the peoples and nations of the world.

The Cross of Christ stands as a sign of contradiction to all the corruptions suffered by the children of Adam and Eve, including those we have welcomed into our hearts for whatever reason. The Lord said, "Whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of man also be ashamed, when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels." We do not have to burn incense on the altar of a Roman god in order to show that we are ashamed of the Saviour. All that we must do is to refuse to take up our crosses as we serve the false gods of this world. It does not take much spiritual insight to see that worshiping idols is quite common and easily done in our time and place.

We commit idolatry when we are so consumed with other matters that we refuse to take the time to open our hearts to God in prayer each day of our lives. We commit idolatry when we are so addicted to our money and possessions that we refuse to give as we can to those in need. We commit idolatry when we refuse to limit our indulgence in food, drink, and other bodily comforts for the healing of our souls and the benefit of our poor neighbours. We commit idolatry when we ground our hope for the future on how an election turns out or whether our will is done in any area of life. We commit idolatry when we refuse to be faithful in our daily circumstances in relation to the people and things that are right before us.

Saint Paul wrote, "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ Who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, Who loved me and gave Himself for me." Whenever we refuse to gratify our self-centred desires out of faithfulness to Christ, we die at least a bit to the power of sin as we offer ourselves to share more fully in the life of our Lord. That is how we will deny ourselves, take up our crosses, and follow Him, regardless of the particulars of our lives. We do not seek suffering as an end in itself, but it is inevitable that the tension between faithfulness and idolatry will require struggle and be difficult. There is much within us that does not want to be "crucified with Christ." It is much easier to serve the devil by giving our hearts to some version of worldly success.

The Lord and the Great Martyr Eustathios rejected that temptation, however, and we must also if we want to save our lives for the Kingdom of Heaven. Ultimately, our choice is between taking up our crosses and worshiping ourselves, for we must offer our lives to something or someone. Let us offer ourselves to the One Who has already offered Himself for us and Who makes it possible for us to share personally in His great victory over the enslaving powers of sin and death. He alone has risen victorious over them through His Cross. Now it is time for us to take up our crosses and become participants in His eternal life.

- Fr. Philip LeMasters