



Parish Information Bulletin

Program for 15—21 SEPTEMBER 2024

Telephone Contact Numbers

St Vasilios Church
9387 7693

Fr Athanasios
9383 4151

Fr Ephraim
0490 378 215

Website:
stvasiliosbrunswick.com

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.

SUNDAY 15 SEPTEMBER	SUNDAY AFTER EXALTATION OF PRECIOUS CROSS Mark 8: 34-38, 9: 1 7.30am Orthros and Divine Liturgy
2024 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.	
MONDAY 16 SEPTEMBER <i>St Euphemia, Great-Martyr</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">7.30am Orthros and Divine Liturgy10.00am Meeting of Elderly Citizens in Church Hall
WEDNESDAY 18 SEPTEMBER	<ul style="list-style-type: none">5.00pm Paraklesis to the Theotokos
THURSDAY 19 SEPTEMBER	★ TEENAGE YOUTH GROUP 2024 Please Note: Our Teenage Youth Group Meetings will be taking a holiday break from 19th September and resume on 10th October 2024.
FRIDAY 20 SEPTEMBER <i>Great-Martyrs St Eustathios and His Companions</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">7.30am Orthros and Divine Liturgy
SUNDAY 22 SEPTEMBER	GOSPEL READING: Luke 5: 1-11 EPISTLE READING: I Corinthians 16: 13-24

FINDING HEALING THROUGH SACRIFICE: HOMILY FOR THE SUNDAY AFTER THE EXALTATION OF THE CROSS IN THE ORTHODOX CHURCH

Fr. Philip LeMasters

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

Today we continue to celebrate the Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross. It may seem strange that we devote certain periods of the Church year especially to the Cross because it is so characteristic of our entire life in Christ. No matter what else is going on in the Church or in our own lives, we are never done with the Cross, for our Saviour calls us—just as He did His original disciples—to take up our crosses and follow Him each and every day. That is not a command limited to certain days or periods, for it is a calling that permeates the Christian life.

Our Lord's disciples, like the other Jews of that time, had apparently expected a Messiah who would have had nothing to do with a cross. They wanted a successful ruler, someone like King David, who would destroy Israel's enemies and give them privileged positions of power in a new political order. So they could not accept His clear word that He would be rejected, suffer, die, and rise again. When St. Peter actually tried to correct Him on this point, Christ called him "Satan" and said that he was thinking in human terms, not God's. To place the pursuit of worldly power over faithful obedience was a temptation Christ had faced during His forty days of preparation in the desert before His public ministry began. Then that same temptation came from the head disciple, and the Lord let St. Peter know in no uncertain terms that He must serve God and not the powers of this world. To place worldly success over sacrificial obedience was, and is, simply the work of the devil.

The Saviour told the disciples what they did not want to hear: that they too must take up their crosses and lose their lives in order to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. The same is true for us, for whatever false gods we are tempted to serve cannot conquer sin and death or bring healing to our souls. To serve them is to become their slaves and to receive nothing in return but weakness and despair. The word of the Cross is that we too must lose ourselves in the

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service of the Kingdom in order to participate personally in our Lord's great victory and blessing, both now and for eternity.

Though we do not like to acknowledge it, true holiness contradicts conventional standards of success in our corrupt world. The way of the Cross judges all nations, people, and cultures, and makes clear how they fall short. The witness of the martyrs from the origins of the faith right up until today in the Middle East, Africa, Asia, and elsewhere makes that especially clear. But let us not think that taking up the cross is reserved only for those called to make the ultimate sacrifice. For He calls every one of us to become a living martyr by dying to our sinfulness, to how we have wounded ourselves, our relationships, and our world. To turn away from corruption in any of its forms is to take up the cross. We do not want to hear it, but if we want to share in the joy of Christ's resurrection, we must first participate in the struggle, pain, and sacrifice of crucifixion.

That does not mean convincing ourselves that we are being persecuted for our faith whenever someone criticizes or disagrees with us. It does not mean having a "martyr complex" in which we sacrifice in order to gain sympathy from others. We must never distort our faith into a way of getting what we want from others, a habit of feeling sorry for ourselves, or a means of justifying hatred or resentment towards anyone for any reason. If we crucify others even in our thoughts for whatever reason, we turn away from the true Cross. Instead, our calling is to follow the example of our Lord in forgiving even those who hate and reject us.

The One Who offered up Himself calls us to crucify our own sinful desires and actions, the habits of thought, word, and deed that lead us to worship and serve ourselves instead of God and neighbour. That is very hard to do in a culture that celebrates self-centeredness and self-indulgence. In the name of being true to ourselves, many today justify everything from adultery and promiscuity to abusing and abandoning their own children. If any of their desires goes unfulfilled, many feel justified in falling into anger, hatred, and even violence toward those who offend them. Many people are such slaves to their own desires that there is no limit to their wrath when those desires are not met. Of course, this is simply a form of idolatry, of worshiping ourselves instead of the One who went to the Cross for our salvation.

If we are honest, we will confess that living that way simply makes us miserable, ashamed, and even more enslaved to our passions. Contrary to popular opinion, it is a path toward ever greater weakness, not toward strength of any kind. It may seem possible to gain the whole world for a time by living that way, but those who do still end up losing their souls.

Saint Paul said of himself, "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ Who lives in me." By dying to his sins, St. Paul became a living icon of the Lord. Our Saviour's glorification of humanity was made present in his life. He became truly himself in the divine image and likeness by sharing in the Lord's death and resurrection. The same is true of all the Saints, of all those who have manifested in their own lives the holiness of our Lord, whether they died as martyrs or not.

In our culture, it is not hard to find false substitutes for taking up our crosses and following our Lord. We may think that simply expressing ourselves is somehow really virtuous. But true holiness is much more demanding than stating an opinion, "liking" a post on social media, or putting a bumper sticker on our car. For example, it is much harder to give of our time, energy, and resources to help a troubled or needy person than it is to agree with the idea of helping others. It is much more difficult to live a life of chastity and purity as man and woman in our decadent culture than it is to call for moral decency in society or to criticize others whose struggles we do not know. Most of us have more than enough work to do in purifying our own hearts before we start worrying too much about how others are doing.

Regardless of how correct we may be on any issue or problem, words and thoughts alone will not help us die to the power of sin in our lives, especially if they inflame passions such as self-righteous pride or judgment toward particular people. In order for our faith to be more than a reflection of how we think or feel, we must act in ways that require self-sacrifice and help to purify our hearts. We must actually follow Christ in our daily lives by taking up our crosses.

We may do so by enduring sickness or other persistent personal challenges and disappointments with patience, humility, and deep trust that the Lord will not abandon us. There is no "one size fits all" journey to the Kingdom, no legal definition, even as the Saints include people of so many different life circumstances and personalities. Regardless of our situation, we all have the opportunity to bear our crosses in relation to the particular challenges that we face. Most of us do not need to go looking for spiritual challenges; if we will open our eyes, we will see that they are right before us.

Christ calls us all to live as those who are not ashamed of His Cross. That means that we must take practical, tangible steps every day in order to die to the corrupting influence of sin so that we may participate more fully in the new life that our Saviour has brought to the world. If we do not, then we deny our Lord and His Cross. If we do not, we worship the false god of self because we refuse to place obedience to the way of the Saviour over obedience to our own self-centred desires. Our ultimate choice is not between this or that opinion or idea, but between uniting ourselves to our Lord in His great Self-Offering and simply serving ourselves. One is a path to life, while the other leads only to the grave.

If we ever think that we are serving the Lord faithfully when we are not sacrificing to bear our crosses, then we should think again. We must not commemorate the Cross only in certain periods of the Church year, but every day of our lives in how we live, how we treat others, and how we respond to our temptations, weaknesses, and chronic challenges. The Saviour offered Himself in free obedience on the Cross for the salvation of the world, and it is only by taking up the cross of dying to sin's corruption in our lives that we will share in the great victory that He worked through it. He conquered death in His glorious resurrection on the third day. We will participate personally in His great triumph only if we deny ourselves, take up our crosses, and follow Him. That is what it means to be one of His disciples.