



# Evangelion

A Bulletin of Orthodox Christian Faith

7 April 2013

By accepting a suspicion against the neighbour, by saying, ‘What does it matter if I put in a word about my suspicion? What does it matter if I find out what my brother is saying or what a guest is doing?’ the mind begins to forget about its own sins and to talk idly about his neighbour, speaking evil against him, despising him, and from this he falls into the very thing he condemns. Because we become careless about our own faults and do not lament our own death, we lose the power to correct ourselves and we are always at work on our neighbour.

Saint Dorotheos of Gaza

**Sunday 7 April 2013 is the  
Sunday of the Veneration of the  
Holy Cross**

**Matins Gospel:** John 21:14-25

**Epistle:** Hebrews 4:14-16; 5:1-6

**Gospel:** Mark 8:34-38; 9:1

**Apolytikion for the feast:**

Lord, save your people and bless your inheritance, granting to faithful Christians victories over their enemies, and protecting your commonwealth by your Cross.

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## Readings and saints for this week:

**Monday:** Isaiah 14:24-32; Genesis 8:21-9:7; Proverbs 11:19-12:6  
Herodion, Agabus, Rufus, Asyncritus of the 70; Rufus the Obedient

**Tuesday:** Isaiah 25:1-9; Genesis 9:8-17; Proverbs 12:8-22  
Martyr Euphychius; Vadim the Righteous of Persia

**Wednesday:** Isaiah 26:21-27:9; Genesis 9:18-10:1; Proverbs 12:23-13:9  
Martyrs Terence & companions; Hieromartyr Gregory V of Constantinople

**Thursday:** Isaiah 28:14-22; Genesis 10:32-11:9; Proverbs 13:19-14:6  
Martyr Antipas; Parmuthios the Anchorite

**Friday:** Isaiah 29:13-23; Genesis 12:1-7; Proverbs 14:15-26  
Basil the Confessor; Mother Anthona

**Saturday:** Hebrews 6:9-12; Mark 7:31-37  
Martin the Confessor

## Taking up our cross

Today, on the third Sunday of Great Lent, the Sunday of the veneration of the Holy Cross, we listen to Saint Mark’s Gospel and hear Jesus Christ’s challenging words about what it means to be His followers. He calls us to renounce ourselves, take up our cross and follow Him, and warns us that if we seek to save our lives we will surely lose them.

These are disturbing words and remind us of the great cost involved in being a Christian. Too often we can domesticate what it means to bear our cross, forgetting that, for Christ, the Cross was something that cost Him His life. And He reminds us in this Gospel that, if we are to be His followers, it will also cost us our life.

We might wonder at this. Is not our life a gift from God, and does He not desire that we should live it to the full? Why should He expect us to renounce life? Does God really want us to be miserable? Jesus gives us a clue to this paradox by telling us that “whoever loses his life for my sake, and for the sake of the Gospel, will save it.”

Jesus Christ came to bring us abundant life and to restore to life those who are in the tombs, as we will sing at Pascha. But in order for us to receive this gift of life we need to die to all of our tendencies to sin, to renounce our own selfishness and the many ways it has infiltrated our lives, and to open ourselves to genuinely following Christ. What this involves will be different for each one of us, but we know that there is no true life which does not involve dying to ourselves. And we know too that, in doing so, we receive the only life that is truly worth living.

In Paradise of old the tree stripped me bare; for by giving me its fruit to eat, the enemy brought in death. But now the Tree of the Cross that clothes men with the garment of life has been set up on earth, and the whole world is filled with boundless joy. Beholding it venerated, O ye people, let us with one accord raise in faith our cry to God: His house is full of glory.

From Matins for the Veneration of the Holy Cross



## Our Lenten Prayer

### The Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts

One of the characteristic services of Great Lent is that of the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts which is usually held on Wednesdays and Fridays, or possibly on only one of these days. The Divine Liturgy is not celebrated on weekdays during Lent (except on the Feast of the Annunciation), but in order that we may be sustained by the reception of Holy Communion during our Lenten efforts, the Church developed this service from very early times. It is not a Eucharistic Liturgy in the full sense as there is no consecration of the Holy Gifts, but is rather a service at which we may receive Holy Communion from the Gifts that have been consecrated at a previous Liturgy.

The Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts is combined with the solemn service of Vespers, and is thus an evening service although it is sometimes anticipated in the morning. During the psalms of Vespers

the Presanctified Gifts are prepared for Holy Communion. After the Entrance and the evening hymn, the Old Testament readings from Genesis and Proverbs are read, between which the priest blesses the people with a lighted candle and the words: "The Light of Christ illumines all," indicating that the Old Testament prophecies have reached their fulfilment in Jesus Christ. After this some verses from Psalm 141 are sung, together with the offering of incense, leading in to the second part of the service.

After the Litany of the Catechumens – during which those preparing for baptism were originally dismissed in the early Church – the service continues with the solemn transferring of the Holy Gifts to the altar. Externally this resembles the Great Entrance during the Divine Liturgy, but its significance is different. We are not offering the Gifts to be consecrated, as we do in the Eucharistic Liturgy, but rather recognising and receiving Christ's presence in the already consecrated Gifts that are brought forth in procession. As the priest prays just before the Entrance with the Holy Gifts:



*For behold, His most pure Body and His life-giving Blood,  
entering at this present hour,  
Are about to be spread forth upon this mystical altar,  
Invisibly escorted by a great multitude of the heavenly host.  
Enable us to partake of them in blamelessness,  
That the eyes of our understanding being enlightened thereby,  
We may become children of the light and of the day  
Through the gift of Thy Christ...*

After the Holy Gifts are placed on the altar there are more litanies and prayers and the Our Father is sung before the faithful receive Holy Communion to the chanting of "O taste and see how good is the Lord. Alleluia." The service concludes with a prayer that sums up the meaning of the service and its role in our Lenten struggle:

*O Almighty Lord, who has made all created things in Wisdom, and by Thine inexpressible Providence and great goodness has brought us to these all-holy days for the purification of body and soul, for the controlling of carnal passions, and for the hope of the Resurrection; who during the forty days didst give into the hand of Thy servant Moses the Tables of the Law ... enable us also, O Good One, to fight the good fight, to accomplish the course of the Fast, to preserve inviolate the faith, to crush underfoot the heads of invisible serpents, to be accounted victors over sin and to attain uncondemned and adore the Holy Resurrection.*

## The Veneration of the Holy Cross

Today, on the third Sunday of Great Lent, we commemorate and adore the Holy and Life-Giving Cross of Christ. In some ways this is similar to the feasts of the Exaltation and Procession of the Cross that we celebrate on 14 September and 1 August. However, this feast is not connected to any historical event, but is rather given to us to mark an important place on our Lenten pilgrimage. It tells us that we are in the middle of Great Lent.

Like the people of Israel we have been wandering in the desert, cast out of Paradise, aware of our alienation from God, but also of our desire to return to Him. If we have been fasting seriously, we are probably getting to the point where we are beginning to feel it, and we may even be asking ourselves whether it is all worth it.

The Church gives us this feast to encourage us on our pilgrimage to Pascha. It likens the Holy and Life-giving Cross to the spring of Marah which the children of Israel encountered in the wilderness (Ex 15:22-25). Its waters were bitter, but when the Prophet Moses placed a piece of wood in the water they became sweet prefiguring the Cross of Christ which likewise sweetens our Lenten fast.

This day also marks a shift in focus, from our own repentance and Lenten efforts to the events of Holy Week and Pascha. We are called to turn our attention to Christ and His sacrifice and we also receive strength from the knowledge of His Resurrection that we are journeying towards.



O Christ our God, of Thine own will Thou hast accepted Crucifixion, that all mankind might be restored to life. Taking the quill of the Cross, out of love for man in the red ink of royalty with bloody fingers Thou hast signed our absolution. We are in danger once more of being parted from Thee; O forsake us not! Take pity on Thy people in distress, for Thou alone art longsuffering. Rise up and fight against our enemies in Thine almighty power.

From Vespers for the Veneration of the Holy Cross